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## **ADVOCACY FOR INFUSION OF GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING SERVICES IN ADULT LITERACY PROGRAMMES IN NIGERIA**

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### **Abstract**

*There appears that literacy centres in Nigeria do not care about counselling needs of their clients. Adult learners come to learning centres with a lot of needs which cannot only be solved through acquisition of skills of reading, writing and numeracy. Guidance and counselling services will serve better purpose in this direction. This paper seeks to advocate for inclusion of guidance and counselling services in adult literacy programmes in Nigeria. The position is that literacy centres can serve adults not only in acquisition of literacy skills of reading, writing and numeracy but also exploring the diverse experiences of literacy participants in solving individual personal problems brought to the centres. Literacy centres can serve as avenue where learners can collectively address the problems bogging their colleagues with the help of their facilitators. The paper recommends that for the possibility of infusion of G & C in literacy programmes, adult education training outfits must include G & C in their curriculum. Training and retraining opportunities should be made available to literacy facilitators in G & C service delivery. Literacy planners and organizers should create space for adult G & C needs in their programme and by extension in the time-table in such a way that will not jeopardize the primary motive of literacy programme.*

### **Introduction**

In the world today, there is a growing demand for learning opportunities for the adult learners, with an increasing opportunity to access learning through different modes including adult literacy programme. Adult literacy programme is an important programme among adult education programmes in developing countries. This is because, a large number of adult illiterates are found in this region. Ordinarily, literacy programmes are meant to serve adults who are not opportune to acquire basic education in their childhood through formal system. The programme provides a second chance for these categories of adults to acquire reading, writing

and numeracy skills to enable them use the skills in the day-to-day activities they involve themselves in the society.

It is believed that at literacy classes, adult learners meet with their facilitators and other adult learners, thereby creating a suitable avenue where their personal problems in the world of work, family, learning, etc can be solved through the experiences of the facilitators and other adult learners. The diverse experiences of the different adult learners can be explored to solve their problems. Obviously, adult learners need guidance and counselling services especially to help them make the right choices and to benefit fully from the available opportunities.

Therefore, at this point, the infusion of guidance and counselling services into literacy curriculum becomes an indispensable phenomenon that will serve better purpose in the promotion and improvement of adult literacy programmes.

From the foregoing, this paper advocates for infusion of guidance and counselling services into adult literacy programme in Nigeria to enable literacy participants not only acquire literacy skills but also benefit from their facilitators and colleagues who are highly experienced to provide useful, wise and intelligent advice to solving problems. To this end, the paper examines objectives and contents of adult literacy programme in Nigeria; guidance and counselling services; differences between guidance and counselling; the need for guidance and counselling services in literacy programmes; and strategies for providing guidance and counselling services

### **Conceptual Framework**

Literacy connotes the ability to acquire the skill of reading, writing and numeracy in any language. Literacy is a peculiar term in education and is frequently used in adult education. There is literacy for children and adults. Normally, at primary school level the children are exposed to basic skills in reading, writing and numeracy. These skills will lay solid foundation for lifelong learning. Normally, every child is expected to acquire basic literacy skills at this level, the inability of many children to acquire these skills has given birth to adult illiteracy later in life. In combating this, adult literacy programme becomes succour. Literacy according to Indabawa (1995) is referred to as the ability to acquire the skills of reading, writing and numeracy in local or foreign language for effective and efficient functioning of individuals in the activities they involve themselves in the society. UNESCO (2002) affirms that literacy is crucial to the acquisition, by every child, youth and essential life skills that enable them to address the challenges they face in life and represents essential step in basic education, which is an indispensable means for effective participation in the societies and economies of the 21st century. UNESCO (2004) while emphasizing the goal of universal literacy under the motto: literacy as freedom, reflecting the evolution of literacy submits that: beyond its simple notion as the set technical skills of reading, writing and calculating – to a plural notion encompassing the manifold meanings and dimensions of these undeniably vital competences. Such a view,

responding to recent economic, political and social transformations, including globalization, and advancement of information and communication technologies, recognizes that there are many practices of literacy embedded in different cultural process, personal circumstances and collective structures. In his contribution, Sarumi (2005) opined that literacy can no longer be defined as the ability to read, write and compute or numeric alone, but it must include adaptation to global information, skills, attitude and knowledge. It can be added that literacy programme should be rich enough to address enormous problems confronting adults in their respective communities.

Guidance is fundamentally regarded as a process of helping individuals to understand themselves and the world they live (Shertezer, 1987 in Salawu, 2000), it is an elaborate preparations, arrangement and programmes directed towards helping individual (s) make wise, intelligent choice and decision (Saye, nd:1). Under guidance programme, individuals (clients) are led to understanding their abilities, potentials, weakness, attitudes, interests and capabilities. In general term, guidance aims at helping clients to grow in his independence and ability to be responsible for himself. That is giving the recipient of the guidance service help that will make him/her solving his/her problems. Honestly, adult literacy participants can serve as helpers among themselves to solving individuals' problems brought to the learning centres apart from learning the skills of reading and writing.

Different scholars have given different perspectives to the concept counselling. Counselling to Tambawal (2009:175) is a personalized, intimate interview or dialogue between a person experiencing some emotional, social, educational, physical, and vocational problems and a professional counsellor. The task of counselling as seen by Denga (2009) is to give the individual the opportunity to define, explore, discover and adopt ways of living a more satisfying and resourceful life within the social, educational and vocational groupings within which he or she is identified or finds himself or herself. Counselling connotes one-to-one relationship between the client who has problems and cannot single-handedly solve the problems and a trained or experienced person who can come up with the solutions to the various personal types of difficulties of the client.

The import of the above definitions of the two terms (guidance and counselling) is that assistance is given to the person who has problems to solve the problems with his own involvement and experience of the other person called guidance or counsellor. There is no doubt that coming together of adult learners at literacy centres by the different experienced and diverse personalities adults can be assisted in solving social, economic, psychological etc difficulties facing them.

**Adult Literacy Programmes in Nigeria: Objectives and Contents**

In its aim to eradicate illiteracy in Nigeria, the Nigerian government launched its first phase of its Mass Literacy Programme in 1979, to enhance the potential of the disadvantaged and marginal groups' particularly adult illiterates, so that they too could make a meaningful contribution in society. Consequently, the National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-formal Education was established with a view to develop and formulate programmes geared towards assisting adults who were illiterate to acquire the basic knowledge and skills of numeracy and literacy. The states throughout the federation established their own state agencies for mass education with the same aim at the state levels. In pursuance of this general goal the state agencies mount different adult and non-formal education programmes. Adult literacy remains an important programme of the state mass education agencies to really address the intractable nature of adult illiteracy in the country.

The objectives of the Adult Literacy programme run by the agencies are to enable the target groups to surmount the barrier imposed by illiteracy by providing them with basic literacy/numeracy skills. It also sought to provide functional, technical/vocational literacy programmes for adults and other individuals not within the formal education system for socio-economic purposes

The key aims of the Adult Literacy Programme generally may include:

1. to enable the individual to acquire basic knowledge and skills of numeracy, understanding, speaking, reading and writing the English Language;
2. to enhance the individual's capacity potential for personal development and the quality of his/her contribution to the family community and society through participation and response to situations demanding literacy skills; and
3. to re-affirm the societal cultural identity and create the possibility of mastering and effecting meaningful changes in the community.

To achieve the following specific literacy objectives, agencies for mass education in Nigeria run basic literacy, post literacy, functional literacy, among others. Specifically, basic literacy gives the skills of reading, writing and numeracy to adults who have not had the opportunity of formal education in their childhood. The programme is normally taught in local or English language which last for nine (9) months. After which the graduates of basic literacy proceed to post literacy of two (2) years. At this level, the participants are introduced to other subjects such as Social Studies, Elementary Science, etc in English language. The completers of post literacy programme are equivalents of completers of primary school education.

Functional literacy combines the skills of reading, writing and numeracy with the socio-economic activities of the learners. The learners are taught the literacy skills in

the content of the occupations they do. Functional literacy leads to the acquisition of economic skills which gives the learners economic independence.

The content of adult literacy programme in Nigeria has been described above centres on acquisition of basic literacy skills (reading, writing and numeracy) and economic activities. There is no doubt that given ample opportunities literacy centres provide for learners, literacy participants can simultaneously benefit from the experienced colleagues and professional counsellors in solving problems bogging them. Certainly, infusion of guidance and counselling services into adult literacy programme will create an avenue where literacy participants can conveniently solve their problems. What are the guidance and counselling services adult literacy participants can benefit from? In answering this question, we have to look at the various guidance and counselling services available to adults.

### **Guidance and Counselling Service**

Adults in the course of their daily lives are often confronted with the need to make significant choices and decisions that not only affect them personally but those around them as well. Although, adults have many strengths that may be called upon in times of need, some problems and losses may require outside assistance or guidance. Guidance according to Fasokun, Katahoire. & Oduaran (2005) is providing information to facilitate informed decision-making and choices. Traditionally it can be sought from or given by those who are more senior in terms of age and who are more informed and more experienced in specific areas. For example guidance related to educational matters is often sought from those who are part of the educational system. Mostly, potential adult learners also seek guidance from those whom they believe may be more informed about educational matters than they are. Thorpe and Grugeon (1987) put it that adults who study full time or part time need advice and encouragement on a broader basis than only on the content of the course that they are studying. On the other hand, for some people, it is the memory of painful events in the past, dissatisfaction in the present, worries about the future, difficulty with decision making, family responsibilities, financial limitations, job seeking, preparations for retirement, competing time demands, and unfamiliarity with procedures may become despaired about life as a result fail to achieve their goals. In fact, these and many other related areas need counselling services for remedy. Counselling as Fasokun, Katahoire & Oduaran (2005) describe it, entails working with learners to help them discover, clarify and understand their learning needs (and problems) and the various ways of meeting them. Learners, who confront problems such as poor study procedure, changed work assignments, family illness, or difficulties with transportation, sometimes drop out because they are unaware of assistance to help solve or work around these difficulties. To salvage this situation therefore, counselling information services must be made available at adult literacy centres. These services include the following.

**Information Services**

Adults need a number of information to be able to function effectively in their daily pursuit in life. Information on economic opportunities, religious affairs, and political happenings can go a long way to improve adults' personalities in their communities. Salawu ( nd ) remarks that information services are designed to provide individuals with knowledge of educational, vocational and personal-social opportunities that are available within the society. Certainly, information of this kind will make adults better informed to make wise, intelligent and useful choices and decisions in an increasing complex society.

**Career Information Counselling Services**

As the provision of career development services for adults becomes increasingly important, a career information counselling services must help deal with diverse client populations, adults' need for personal involvement in career planning such as information about seeking for job, preparing for job and what it takes to sustain a career. In fact how to seek for better job opportunities constitutes part of career information counselling services.

**Educational Counselling Services**

Adult learning is believed to be complex. Its complexity arises from changes that adults experience as they aged. The changes manifested in social, cultural, economic, and physiological factors that influence the adults' doings. Psychologists believe that age has negative effect on human intelligence. This effect brings about intellectual decline in adults which affects their learning ability. Other factors associated with this are decline in sensory acuity, decline in vision, and decline in hearing. The psychological implication of this is that it has influence upon adults' confidence and also increases their feelings that they cannot cope with new learning. In order to help adult learners an effective counselling service must be made available in literacy centres that will help create an enabling environment for effective learning. Effort must be made to convince adult learners that new learning is possible despite their peculiarities.

**Referral Services**

With the complexity of human nature, a problem may arise where solution may lie out of the scope of adult literacy counsellors' knowledge. Where such arises, the counsellor waste no time in referring such a client to where he/she could be taken care of. In this regard adult literacy participants who could not be assisted by literacy counsellor could be referred to the specialists who can solve the arisen problems.

There is no doubt that the enumerated counselling services can go a long way to improve living standard of adults and help solve their personal and community problems. Coming together of adults at literacy centres could be advantageous to

them not only making them literate but also benefitting from devised experiences of their colleagues and facilitators in addressing problems bogging them.

### **Differences between Guidance and Counselling**

Woolfe, Murgatroyd and Rhys (1987:3) proclaim that 'guidance and counselling can be conceived as opposite ends of a continuum concerned with the nature of the relationship between helpers and those seeking help'. In this context the helpers are the adult educators and those seeking help are the adult learners or potential learners. At one end of the continuum is guidance, which is a relatively directive form of advice and information giving. At the other end, there is counselling, which is relatively non-directive and is concerned with facilitating a process of decision-making by the person needing help. Adult educators perform these functions both formally and informally as part of their work. The question that arises now is whether they are professionally trained to perform these functions.

As a matter of fact, very few adult education providers offer guidance by making information about their programmes available. While some adult education providers may have brochures or handbooks with information about programmes they offer, very few non-formal adult education providers have written information on the programmes they offer. As a result of this many potential adult learners are unaware of crucial information necessary for them to make informed decisions and choices. As such once adult learners have enrolled, guidance needs to continue during the learning process. For example, some learners may experience problems during the course of their study and to stop for sometimes. They will need guidance on how to go about this process. Sometimes choices of subjects have to be made and here again learners will need guidance. Even after learners have completed their programme and are ready to move on to the stage they may need career guidance. Therefore the provision of guidance services for adult learners at the literacy centres becomes very crucial. Counselling on the other hand takes into account both the emotional and the cognitive aspect of the adult learners. Many adults who enrol in education are very anxious about their ability to succeed. They perceived themselves as being too old and therefore not able to learn as effectively as the younger learners they sometimes share classes with. These kinds of perceptions lead to a lot of anxiety especially where the educational programmes involves assignment and exams. Adult learners that attend literacy classes have expressed similar sentiments. It is important for adult educators to help learners with such anxieties to cope effectively with their learning programmes, by listening to their aspirations, concerns and problems. They could also discuss their plans and performance with individual learners and then advise them on study skill. Through counselling, adult learners can be assisted to develop confidence and skills that can help them to appreciate themselves, their creativity and abilities, thereby reducing these anxieties and improve the level of performance.



Unlike guidance, counselling does not imply that the counsellor tells the learner what decisions to make and does not issue instructions about how to set off in a new direction or which direction to take. The counsellor only helps the learners to do this for themselves. There is no place for phrases such as 'if I were you I would' or 'what you need to do is...' if information is given during counselling it is provided in an unbiased manner so that people in need are better equipped to weigh a situation and choose between alternative courses of action for themselves.

### **Justifications for Infusing Guidance and Counselling Services in Adult Literacy Programme in Nigeria**

Many adult learners choose to enrol in either formal or non-formal education programmes face major challenges. Such as prevailing poverty, underdevelopment of basic infrastructure, lack of access to basic information and lack of services such as guidance and counselling aggravate many of these challenges experienced by adult learners. Some of these problems can be attributed to the individual himself, others to institutional and environmental factors. For example Fasokun, Katahoire & Oduaran (2005) rightly put it that, as a result of inadequate guidance and counselling, some learners enrol for courses without clearly understanding the demands that the course will have on their time. Others enrol without adequate knowledge about the actual costs. Others underrate the complexity of the content that they are expected to cover as part of the programme. As a result some of the adult learners are forced to drop out of the programmes because they do not have the time, cannot meet the costs involve, or find the contents too difficult. These are all problems that can be avoided if potential adult learners are adequately guided before enrolling in programmes.

Vocational related issues can also serve as motivation for providing adults with counselling services. Many adults cannot afford to retire or choose not to do so. The problem of unemployment or underemployment for older workers is significant. In addition to the normal difficulties facing any job seeker, older workers encounter discriminatory practices, stereotypical attitudes, changes in their abilities, and a negative self-image. Self-defeating attitudes and behaviours need to be addressed before successful job placement can occur; a good counsellor-client relationship is crucial to the outcome. Certainly, literacy centres can serve as a better venue where these services can be provided.

Adjustment to retirement honestly, needs counselling. This is because retirement is a critical and often traumatic event that may result in restlessness rather than rest. Counsellors have an important role in giving information, suggesting meaningful options, and providing opportunities for adjusting to life after retirement.

Learning at adulthood is characterised with certain dispositions from different adult learners. Some learners had favourable learning experiences during their childhood

while some had unfavourable learning experiences. These experiences can either make or mar effective learning. Promoting effective learning among adults will require efficient counselling services. Adult learners face many of the same barriers and stereotypes that older workers do. Education in later life can be enjoyed for its own sake as well as for updating job skills or learning leisure pursuits.

Contrary to many expectations, adult learners are highly motivated and do well academically. Their experiences and vitality are often beneficial to younger students. While many elders have no problem adjusting, special considerations may be needed in terms of lighting, parking, security, study guides and outlines, and provisions for hearing or vision deficiencies. In addition guidance and counselling services in this direction can be given. Older persons are often reluctant to seek help and view counselling with doubt, suspicion, and anxiety. They often rely on the family members, friends, co-workers, co-learners, or their own support network of family and friends. Coming together at literacy classes adult learners can overcome their learning problems with help of their colleagues.

Generally, our societies experience rapid changes in both physical environment, family, economic, political, technological as well as psychosocial phenomena. Modern Nigerians today is disturbed by stresses as a result of socio-economic mess, population growth, traffic hold-up, mismanagement, competition for spaces power, and other resources etc; which result in tussles and thereby pushes them to the wall (Saye, 2002). The situations certainly need guidance and counselling services to be surmounted. One can run for help via trained and experienced counsellors including adult literacy facilitators and adult learners. To achieve this, strategies for providing guidance and counselling services in adult literacy centres must be proposed, especially that this paper advocates for infusion of guidance and counselling services in literacy programme.

### **Strategies for Providing Guidance and Counselling Services in Adult Literacy Centres**

Possibility of infusing counselling services in literacy classes requires effective strategies. On this note, the following strategies are proposed.

**Individual counselling;** this provides the opportunity to share problems with someone skilled in listening and helping people deal with problems or losses. Literacy participants individually can help solve the problem bogging any of their members. Individual counselling allows people to set achievable goals and suggest ways of attaining those goals. The literacy participant who one of his/her colleagues seeks for help but cannot help can also make referrals to other members who can solve the problems. This method will require the adult who needs solution to his/her problems to open up to his/her colleagues so that he can be helped. The

practicability of this method demands cooperation of literacy coordinators and facilitators who will create avenue for adult cross-fertilization of ideas on different issues interesting adult learners. Literacy facilitators can also give room for adult learners to openly come to discuss their problems with them and help them accordingly.

### **Group counselling**

This counselling strategy provides participants the opportunity to give and receive emotional support from their peers. Problem solving is promoted through the sharing of mutual experiences. This is done in group. Time should be created in time table in literacy class where adult participants can openly speak their problems among their colleagues and collectively provide solutions to the problems. Here literacy participants can be got connected which will help improve their socio-economic life. Social-psychological problems of adult learners can equally be helped through brainstorming among their colleagues. Group counselling can neutralize some of the potential problems of traditional one-to-one counselling, such as the counsellor's own unresolved feelings toward aging and death, as well as age bias. Group counselling encourages supportive sharing and social interaction which may help replace lost family or work contacts. The elderly can share past experiences denied to younger persons and reinforce appropriate social roles of aging. Peer counselling programs are often effective and can be used to reach adults in addressing their problems.

### **Conclusion**

Guidance and counselling services are a necessity for all adult learners and a responsibility for all adult educators. Fasokun, Katahoire, & Oduaran (2005) stated that it is important that all trained adult educators are able to offer these services as part of their work. They should be able to assist the adults they interact with to grow in the direction that they choose, to solve problems and to face crises. Because sometimes the adult learners are not always able to recognise that they need help and are not always willing to seek help from their educators. The position pictures in this paper therefore is that adult literacy centres can equally serve adult learners not only in literacy skills of reading, writing and numeracy but also serve as an avenue where their personal problems in the world of work, family, learning etc can be solved through the experience of their facilitators and other adult learners. The diverse experiences of the different adult learners can be explored in solving their individual problems. Some hours could be assigned to provide counselling services in this direction through individual and group counselling techniques.

### **Recommendations**

Consequently, the practicability of infusing counselling services in adult literacy centres depend on the following recommendations among others.

First, literacy planners and organizers must be ready to include counselling services in their literacy programmes. Modality for inclusion of the services in adult literacy programme must be devised. In the time-table of adult literacy programme, space should be created for counselling services in such a way that acquisition of literacy skills will not be jeopardized.

Adult Education training outfits must include in their curriculum Guidance and Counselling for their trainers to enable them fit in guidance and counselling service delivery. The outfits should also fashion out the Guidance and Counselling curriculum to be used in adult literacy centres which should reflect guidance and counselling needs of adult learners.

Adult literacy facilitators must also be given training and retraining opportunities in guidance and counselling to equip them with latest guidance and counselling services deliveries.

Professional counsellors could also be invited occasionally to help solve adult learners' problems.

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