

THE IMPORTANCE OF GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING UNIT IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS

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Introduction

One of the most important developments in the field of education at the close of the 19th century and at the turn of the 20th century is the guidance movement. Beginning with the first systematic work of George Mevriil in 1885 at the California School of Mechanical in San Francisco, and the work of Frank Parsons (1908) on provision of vocational assistance to young people. The ideas of these two pioneers of guidance and counselling can be translated into three aspects of modern terminology, namely: the appraisal of the individual, the furnishing of occupational information and the provision of counselling.

Guidance and Counselling is a relatively new discipline and growing profession in the Nigerian educational scene. The beginning of this discipline in Nigeria can be dated back to 1959 when a group of Catholic sisters, of St. Theresa's College, Oke Ado, Ibadan felt the need to provide vocational guidance and placement to their final year students (Makinde, 1983). This single act of the catholic sisters led to the formation of what is now known as the Nigerian Career Council in 1962 and by the 11th day of December, 1976 The Counselling Association of Nigeria (CASSON) was inaugurated. One of the objectives of CASSON is to promote effective guidance and counselling in the interest of individuals and society (Okon, 1984).

One thing should be noted here; before the modern guidance and counselling was formerly introduced to the country, Nigeria had the experience of what is known as "traditional counselling". Most societies have been held together by elders, traditional chiefs, parents, the "bokayes", "babalawos", "malamai", "dibia" etcetera. These set of people, in their own ways had performed some elements of guidance and counselling within the societies in which they found themselves. The most common form of counselling given in the traditional Nigerian societies were giving advice and sharing wisdom. In the modern sense, counselling goes beyond giving advice and sharing wisdom. One major difference between the traditional counselling and the modern counseling is that in the traditional counselling, the counsellor is seen as having solution

to the problem of the counsellee. In the modern sense, however, the counsellor is not seen as having solution to the client's problem. The best he can do is to assist the client to have an insight to the possible causes of his/her problem and how to go about finding solutions to it.

Guidance and Counselling practice can then be regarded as being primarily concerned with how to assist the individual client to understand him/herself, the world around him or her and *to be able to live a normal and well-adjusted life*. Within the educational context, however, guidance and counselling could be regarded as the formalized actions taken by the school to make guidance and counselling operational and available to students (Shertzer and Stone, 1976).

Guidance and Counselling Unit in Tertiary Institutions

By tertiary institutions, we are referring to post-secondary institutions like: the Polytechnics, Colleges of Education, Universities etcetera. Tertiary institutions are established for the purpose of training students for the nation's manpower needs at the middle and upper levels, encouraging them to acquire proper values for survival and national development and enhancing their total development to enable them to play appropriate leadership roles. Guidance and Counselling Unit, as an integral part of the education process, has a crucial role to play in tertiary institutions. It is needed to assist in addressing various problems which students are likely to face at this level of education. These include: problems associated with late adolescence and early adulthood, adjustment to life in tertiary institutions and preparation for life outside the school system. It is through the provision of adequate professional assistance to address these problems that the chances of reaching the predetermined goals of establishing tertiary institutions may be considerably achieved.

One major problem facing guidance and counseling in this country, is the lack of recognition and the realization of counselling as an integral part of the education and growth of every child. Many people believed that any teacher, whether trained or untrained, graduate or non-graduate can guide and counsel students. That is what is obtained at the post-primary school level any teacher can be appointed and referred to as "Career mastermistress" or "career adviser". In most cases, he/she has no training and has no insight into the functions of a guidance-counsellor. At the tertiary level, most counselling units do not have trained or professional guidance-counsellors to man them. Students may not even know of their existence. Hence, most of them will graduate without enjoying the benefit of having someone they could talk to who will be non-judgmental when they have problems.

They leave school with very little knowledge about themselves and how to cope with the realities and challenges they would face later in life.

It has been observed that for education to serve as an instrument of human and national development, guidance and counselling needs to be incorporated in its process for appraisal and grooming the nation's talents (Arene & Durojaiye, 1979).

Objectives

As one of the support services that can aid the realization of the objectives for which tertiary institutions are established, the Federal Ministry of Education in its Blue print on Guidance and Counselling for Educational Institutions in Nigeria (2000) observed that guidance-counselling unit at this level is expected to:

- i. Develop in students skills for better self-understanding:
- ii. Equip them with skills for self-improvement both at school and in later life:
- iii. Assist them in adjusting to the life and culture of their institution;
- iv. Provide information on family life education;
- v. Highlight dangers inherent in various social vices (e.g. drug abuse, secret cults, arson, vandalism, etc).
- vi. Help students develop better interpersonal skills;
- vii. Equip them with skills for achieving fulfilling academic life:
- viii. Equip them with knowledge, attitude, and skills for developing adequate social skills; and
- ix. Assist them develop effective time-management skills.

Scope/Fields of Counselling

Looking at the objectives of guidance and counselling unit stated above, one can say with some degree of certainty that problems that could face students in tertiary institutions can be categorized into: Educational. Vocational. Personal-Social and Psychological. In order to accomplish the objectives, therefore, the guidance counsellor should address the four areas. It can be said here that making guidance and counselling operational and available to students, is to provide them with a greater knowledge of educational, vocational and personal-social opportunities so that they may make better informed choices and decisions in an increasingly complex society.

Educational Guidance-Counselling

Many students in our tertiary, institutions are faced with many educational problems. These problems include: lack of educational information, wrong choices of educational courses, gender stereotype in the selection of subjects, poor study habits, note-taking, difficulty in taking examinations and above all lacking someone to whom they can freely confide their concerns.

Educational guidance therefore can be seen as the process of rendering services to students who need assistance in taking decision about important aspects of their education, such as mentioned earlier. This could go a long way to increase their knowledge of educational opportunities. In other words, it is up to the institution to provide preventive, remedial and developmental educational guidance and counselling to its students, so that they can make realistic educational plans for their future.

Vocational Guidance - Counselling

A great number of students experience problems in their vocational development. These include: a lack of knowledge of their own aptitudes and interests, lack of realism, indecision, inflexibility and an unwillingness to change, a lack of occupational information, problem-solving skills and gender stereotypes.

Guidance-counsellors should be aware of all factors that could influence students' vocational choice or interest. Vocational choice should not be made on limited self-knowledge and an inadequate knowledge of occupations since vocational guidance according to Walton (1966) could be regarded as the process of helping a person match his personal attributes and his background with suitable jobs and employment opportunities.

In a constantly changing world, students in tertiary institutions should be helped to see and use current occupational information, clarify their own values, feelings and attitudes and relate them to educational and vocational demands. There is always the need for guidance-counsellors to apply the principles of vocational choice and vocational guidance whenever they want to assist the students to make informed vocational decisions.

Personal-Social Guidance Counselling

Students in tertiary institutions are growing up in a complex and fast changing society where they often do not understand what is happening or what to do about it. They experience many problems in and outside the school settings. The problems that may

affect them are: anxiety, stress, poor self-image, difficulty in asserting themselves, drug and alcohol abuse, alcohol and tobacco problem, teenage pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, suicide, difficulty in making decisions and solving problems.

Individual and group counselling can be used here as the counsellor deem fit. Social skills that could promote good interaction with different groups of individuals should be instilled in students. Such skills include: obedience, honesty. Kindness, respect for others, respect for property, tolerance, patience, humility, forgiveness, hardwork, no gossiping and good communication skills.

To prevent chaos and the destruction of public properties in tertiary institutions, counselors should provide personal and social guidance to students. Counsellors should learn the causes, symptoms and signs of these problems and know how to prevent, or deal with them. Well destined academic and non-academic programmes in tertiary institutions should help students to assert themselves and to plan for leisure time. The government, the management of the institutions and the home should assist the institutions in this regard.

Psychologically, information on stress management should be provided for students. Examination phobia and test anxiety should be reduced by deemphasizing final exams. Peer counselling and self-help group should be encouraged among students. This is where people, with similar problems meet together without the assistance of a professional leader. They could call in the professional leader, sometimes, may be he could be called upon to help the group get started.

It is hoped that people who participate in peer counselling would appreciate the experience of talking to others who "Know what it feels like" to have a drink, sexual or financial problem.

Conclusion

Among the activities recommended for the counselling units of tertiary institutions to be carried out we have orientation of new students, re-orientation from time to time of the old ones circulation of copies of students handbooks before or at the period of registration, appraisal of students using appropriate psychological tests, organise talk to show and highlight the ills of some social vices (i.e. drug abuse, and secret cult), organise career-day activities or visit professionals at work, hold talks on various study techniques, explain and practice behaviour modification techniques, practice individual and group counselling, arrange referral when necessary and organize talks on various social issues, engaging resource persons from public and private organizations.

Since the guidance-counsellor is a key figure in any counselling relationship, trained counsellors, should be employed in the unit and ideally, he should possess the following personal characteristics emphatic understanding, sympathetic attitude, sense of humour, broadmindedness, social intelligence, patience, objectivity, calmness and common sense and decisiveness. With these qualities the counsellor will be able to respond spontaneously and-effectively to a wide range of human needs.

A counselling centre which is supposed to be a unit where clients come to for counselling on issues that affect them should be well equipped to enhance its effectiveness. As for accommodation, a waiting room where the secretary will be should be provided apart from the counseling room i.e. the counsellor's office with a store and toilet facilities.

Among the basic facilities that should be made available in the counselling centre are:

- i. Writing tables and chairs.
- ii. Easy chairs and side stools.
- iii. Cabinet and book shelves.
- iv. Carpet rug and window curtains.
- v. Refrigerator.
- vi. Radio/Tape recorder.
- vii. Type-writer/a set of computer
- viii. Stationeries.
- ix. Psychological Tests.

In terms of personnel, at least two (2) trained/professional counsellors should be employed to man the counselling centre: a secretary/clerk should be engaged to work with the counsellors. To ease their work, a receptionist and messenger/cleaner should also be engaged to assist the counsellors. To crown it all adequate finance should be provided for the maintenance of the counselling unit. Without finance, the counselling unit will not be able to do all it wanted to.

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