
GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING SERVICES: A PANACEA TO THE SPIRIT OF NATIONAL UNITY AMONG NIGERIAN STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

This paper highlights the roles that guidance and counselling services can play in inculcating the spirit of national unity among Nigerians. It focuses on the meaning of guidance and counselling, the need for guidance services in schools. (It further lays emphasis on the unity of Nigeria as exemplified by our lingua franca, currency, National Anthem and Constitution). It further lays emphasis on the roles of the Counsellor on providing setting that can encourage youth to examine the values, they hold regarding unity among themselves and to train their parents for better family management which offers the greatest promise for averting or reducing the problem of disunity among Nigerian students.

Introduction

Guidance and counselling are required in organization such as schools, universities, hospitals, courts, industries and companies. In fact there is need for guidance and counselling in every place of work for management of human resources at work.

Counselling, however, is still relatively new in the Nigerian Education System. Guidance, in every language, has always carried the connotation of the help given to an individual in the areas of personal, social educational and vocational concerns (Ipaye, 1983). In another development, Okon (1984) defined

guidance as “a total programme of highly specialized activities implemented by all staff members to help individuals make wise and intelligent choices and decisions” (p. 125).

Counselling is part of a guidance programme which may be defined as “a process whereby the counsellor helps a counselee in person to person encounter” (Abdulkadir, 2005). This assistance may be educational, vocational, social or emotional. Counselling is an assistance given by a counsellor or career personnel to another person to identify his/her resources and his/her environmental opportunities in the process of self understanding, planning, decision

making, and coping with problems relative to his/her developmental, educational and vocational needs.

Counselling may therefore be defined as a learning process in which the counsellor helps the counsellee to work at his developmental, educational and vocational needs.

The goal is to help the counsellee arrive at solutions, answers to inquiries/problems about life and to make plans, decisions as well as understand himself, which is satisfactory or rewarding to him and which may help him to grow towards the person he can be. That is, to be an independent and self directing person, who would be able to function optimally in the society in which he finds himself (Makinde, 1985).

In essence, guidance and counselling is based on the assumption that every individual in any society has had, is having and will have a problem that he alone could not solve (Makinde, 1983).

The Needs for Guidance Services in Schools

It has been observed (Umoh, 2004 & Idowu, 2004) that guidance programme and the counselling service within it, usually deals with situational and environmental

conditions. Fundamentally in school, counselling, as well as the total guidance programme, stress rational planning, problem solving and support in the face of situational pressure such as adjustment to dynamic school environment. The aims of counselling whether within the school setting or outside, usually depend on the situation and environment demand/providing guidance and Counselling, especially in school:

- to help student understand themselves in terms of personal ability, interest, motivation and potentials;
- to help student gain insight in to the origins and development of emotional difficulties, leading to an increased capacity to take rational control over feelings and actions;
- to alter maladaptive behaviors;
- to assist student in moving towards the direction of fulfilling their potentials or in achieving an integration of preciously conflicting parts of themselves;
- to provide students with skills, awareness and knowledge which will enable them to confront socially made inadequacies;

- to help student gain some insight in to the world of work, the reality there in and the relationship to their education and specialization; and
- to help student develop decision-making skills.

It is apparent that many young people are ignorant of career prospect and susceptible issue to personality maladjustment, especially among school children. The federal republic of Nigeria National policy on education (FRN, 2004) stated that mandatory students guidance and counselling services would be an integral component of Nigerian institutions (of higher learning or post-primary institutions) as well as the provision of guidance and counselling education for teacher-trainees as a way of boosting the morale of the profession, but also as a way of ensuring optional development of the Nigeria child.

The reasons necessitating the introduction of guidance and counselling service in to educational programme of the Nigeria school, according to Umoh (2004, p.22) include the following:

- Expansion in the enrolment of pupils/students in our school;

- Needs to produce skilled work force;
- Automation in the world of work;
- Growing and complex needs of youths in their country;
- Repeated changes in the education system;
- Problem of unrest in our institutions of learning;
- Problem of national integration;
- Changes in home and family life;
- Problem of cultism; and
- Increasing incidence of examination malpractice among students and staff.

The implication of this is that in order to ensure optimal utilization of the innate potentials in the typical student, he must be provided functional guidance and counselling service in the school.

Using guidance and counselling as a panacea to National unity

The spirit of National Unity could be brought about in the typical Nigeria person through exposure to guidance and counselling techniques as follows:

- (i) Group Dynamic: group dynamic is the process of training the individual on

how to integrate properly in to the modus operandi of a group. Through group dynamic, the individual learns how to participate in group activities, accepts other members and learns to define himself properly in the group as a significant part. Group dynamic trains the sensibility and sentimentality of the individual to be able to accept group norms for the smooth operation of the group. Consequently, such an individual shall learn to be concerned not only about how to accomplish personal goals but more importantly the goals of the group thereby fostering inter-personal harmony or unity.

- (ii) **Guidance and Counselling Games:** There are a number of simulation games already developed in guidance and counselling. The aims of these games are to train the individual the etiquette befitting a perfect gentleman, train the individual to be peaceful in his/her personal relationship and expose the individual to skills of problem solving as a way of living self-directed life. It is expected that with individual's participation in such games (either family

interaction games, happy home game, monopoly, disturbed marital interaction game, family planning games or any other) he/she will learn how to express views peacefully and accept other's view point without rancour. Consequently, irrespective of their backgrounds, such good players would have learnt how to live together with other people in unity.

- (iii) **Marathon Group:** this is a type of group with a feature of incessant/constant interaction. Its philosophy entails training members to be patient, enduring and persevering on the face of situational and environmental pressures. It is not uncommon that most problems of inter-personal conflict results from man's inability to cope with demands and over bearing pressure of his environment. However, with group members' exposure to the grand rules of a typical marathon groups, such individuals would have been properly fortified to relate amicably with other members of their society without acrimony or ill-feelings, thereby leading to

- achievement of national unity.
- (iv) Self-Direction (directive therapy): Albert Ellis (1980), is a firm believer in the individual capability for self-direction. He is of the view that psychological or psychosocial problems emerge when the individual lack the capability to decide for himself or herself the extent of his/her responsibility and unfolding situational and environmental challenge. (The therapy thus seeks to train the individual in the skills of self-management and harmonious co-habitation that would enable him live peacefully with himself and in harmony with others. Self-directive therapy seeks to train people on how to identify their goals, potentials, challenges and strengths, while at the same time the ability of all these together to live cooperatively with others in the psychosocial environment.
- (v) Formation of Social Clubs: There are several legal and harmless clubs to which a student could belong while in school. These include Study Groups, Rotaract Club, Jaycee Club, Muslin Students' Society, Christian Students' Fellowship, Students' Subject Associations. The philosophy of membership of these associations is to train the members in the spirit of living together with others in a cooperative manner. Membership of the association is voluntary and based on personal conviction. The members are supposed to be devoid of egocentrism/selfcentredness, selfishness and bias tendencies. Instead, it is expected that the individual would strive for the well being of other members, protect their collective interest and avoid anything that will bring a fellow member to a disrepute. It is implied that irrespective of their individual ideology, family background or personal bias, the members would be able to live together as a united and strong family who, from time to time, will share the problem of one another through brainstorming and effective group counselling. This may invariably bring about the philosophy of national unity.
- (vi) Excursion: Field trip, educational visit or excursion
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is an educational outlet for training students to appreciate the necessity of collective living and outdoor enlightenment. Bearing in mind that the individual students, detached from their familiar background, is exposed to reality of life outside. The individual learns to live interdependently, with others. He appreciates the existence of others and the relevance of their well being for his own continued existence. Consequently, he is trained to accept the usefulness of other individuals to his well being and vice-versa. It is expected that with this exposure, the individual would have acquired certain principles and skills of interpersonal relationship essential for fostering national unity.

- (vii) Teaching of Civic and Citizenship Education: Civic and citizenship education are meant to teach the students about their rights, the rights of others, their responsibilities as citizens of their country or society. They are supposed to be exposed to the constitutional rights and restraints available to their persons. They are supposed to be enlightened

on the reality that "where their own rights and privileges end is where those of others begin". They are, therefore, expected to learn how to handle their rights and protect the rights of others for peaceful and harmonious living. All these could be achieved through group counselling and group dynamic.

Assumption of Guidance and Counselling

The main purpose of guidance and counselling in our school is firmly rooted in the assumptions that individuals who understand themselves and their world will become more effective, more productive and happier human beings. They would become fully functional persons in the society where they find themselves. Through guidance services, individuals would achieve greater awareness, not only of whom they are but of whom they can become in life.

The following should be the focus of every counsellor in schools as outlined by Ipaye (1983, p. 44):

- To help student develop the skills of self-duty, self-analysis and self-

- understanding to realistic choices.
- To develop in students, an awareness of opportunities in the personal, social, education and vocational areas by providing them with useful and usable information.
- To help students acquire the skills of collecting, collating and using appropriate valid, relevant and current information.
- To help student to relate behaviour that is meaningful to cognitive achievement and chances of success in life.
- To help students who are underachievers use their potentials to the maximum.
- To identify, nurture and direct the nation's human potentials into appropriate useful channels thus preventing unnecessary economic bottle-necks i.e. this will reduce the idea of industrial strike action because workers must have known the problems and prospects of particular jobs before their entry into them.
- To help build in the individual in Nigeria, positive attitude towards fellow Nigerian and a sense of total commitment to the unity of the nation.

- To help direct the nation's human resources to appropriate and useful channels thus preventing unnecessary economic wastage.
- To develop positive attitude to self, to others, to appropriate national issues.

Guidance Services as Instruments of Inculcating the Spirit of National Unity

Nigeria as a developing nation seems to be undergoing a lot of changes both positively and negatively, since the concept of change is inevitable. There is so much uncertainty and instability economically, socially, politically, educationally, vocationally and in other facets of life in the country. Therefore, in a bid to enhance scientific and technological advancement, much emphasis must be laid on the educational, vocational, emotional and the financial needs of the youths who are regarded as the greatest asset of any nation and the future hopes of such a nation. Guidance and counselling as a helping profession has been identified as a tool for the achievement of academic excellence, moral consciousness and adaptive behaviours among school children. Stating the importance of guidance services in educational system, the National Policy on

Education (2004), p.16) has this to say:

In view of the apparent ignorance among people about career prospects and in view of personality maladjustment among school children, career officers and counselors will be appointed in post primary institutions.

As the children mature into adolescent, they begin to encounter adjustment problem, which require counselling assistance in order to experience a smooth transition into adulthood. Pre-marital counselling, marital counselling, career guidance, study habit technique, interpersonal relationship skills, sexuality education, vocational counselling and others are some of the counselling programmes being handled to ensure that the present day children grow and mature into future adults and so become responsible fathers and mothers.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Guidance and counselling becomes relevant in coping with the demands of life as adult. Marriage and family life counselling, stress management skills, drug abuse counselling, health

counselling, career guidance, rehabilitation and retirement counselling are some of the counselling needs of adults. Thus counselling is said to be for all. Everybody needs counselling because it is a process by which every individual could be stimulated to evaluate himself and his opportunities, make a feasible choice in the light of his unique character, and opportunities, accept responsibilities for his choice and initiate a course of action consonant with his choice.

It is very essential to note that counselling is for all categories of people. The family scene in Nigeria has increasingly become turbulent, chaotic, rebellious and depressed. The scene has been accentuated by the current economic recession, which has introduced hunger, anger, political instability, infidelity, wife battering, husband beating, drug abuse, child-abuse, divorce, separation, quarrels over lamentable budgets for housekeeping, embezzlement, indiscipline, HIV/AIDS, poor purchasing power of parents, among others.

Every human being has one problem or the other since life is not a bed of roses; therefore, every individual person needs the services of a counsellor. Nigerians must be enlightened on the uniqueness of the

country as a single indivisible country which must be kept intact by all.

The school is a factory of producing human capital for the development of the society. The students are the raw materials drawn from different socio-economic, cultural and religious backgrounds with their idiosyncrasies which must be managed for unity in diversity. Considering the efficacy of guidance and counselling, the spirit of national consciousness and national unity could be developed and sustained through the services.

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