

***Quality Education through Guidance and Counselling Services in  
National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN)***

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**Abstract**

*This paper essentially examines the role of guidance and counselling in enhancing quality and standard education as being promoted by National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN). In realizing the set objectives, the researcher reviews what Quality Education represents and the part played by guidance and counselling in this regards. Views and opinions of scholars are harnessed as to strengthen the importance the research focuses on. The paper further looks at diverse aspects of guidance and counselling services at NOUN, ranging from orientation to placement of new students and concludes that efforts should be intensified in consolidating on the gains made by NOUN in area of guidance and counselling for over all enhancement of quality and standard education.*

**Keywords:** Quality, Education, Guidance and Counselling, Services.

**Introduction**

Guidance is a programme of services provided by guidance specialists, teachers, as well as administrators. Guidance is designed to help each student adjust to his environment, develop the ability to set realistic goals for himself and improve his total educational programme. Ipaye (1983) cited in Ogbodo (2017), asserts that guidance and counselling is a helping service that provides the atmosphere in which a professional counsellor can help a person or group of persons in terms of resolving educational, vocational and personal-social problems. Guidance as an educational construct involves those experiences, which assist each pupil to understand himself, accept himself and live effectively in his society. Guidance asserts that schools are responsible for the personal growth and character development of children as well as their intellectual development. It stresses the uniqueness and individuality of each student and adds a new dimension to the idea of viewing education as the promotion of self- fulfillment and self-actualization. Guidance in National Open University of Nigeria structure

could be divided into two - group and individual guidance. Group guidance is given to students of the same age group who have identical problems. Individual guidance is given on a one to one basis as in career guidance where the counsellor leads the client to see why he should make subject choices relevant to his proposed career, and considering his aptitude, interest and ability.

Counselling is one of the services rendered by a school's guidance programme and it can be defined as a process in which one person assists another person in a face-to-face encounter. This assistance may take many forms; it may be educational, vocational, socio-personal, recreational, moral or emotional. According to Olayinka (1972), cited in Ogbodo (2016), Counselling in schools and colleges will enable the country to identify her talented youths and nurture them to the optimal level of social, educational and economic development.

Awokoya (1980) as cited in Alutu (2013), felt that without academic and career guidance and counselling in schools, the whole purpose of education cannot be achieved. The student must be counselled about the combination of subjects which will lead to the career in which he/she has interest and motivation. He argued that no matter how good and well structured an educational policy may be as it relates to junior secondary, if guidance and counselling services are not given priority and made an integral part of the system, it cannot succeed.

Guidance and Counselling programme has actually provided us in our present age of complex scientific and technological development, the gateway to resolving the existing numerous problems, ignorance, lack of efficient and effective ways of resolving socio – personal, academic, vocational and many other psychological difficulties individuals and groups in the educational institutions and society are facing.

According to Okorodudu and Okobia (2004) Guidance and counselling tends to deal with everyday problems among school children, adolescents, young adults in the various educational institutions and in different communities. They went on to say that human problems in the educational, vocational, socio personal domains are dynamic and diversified. Some of these, appear complex and solutions to them, go beyond the handling of lay persons. Therefore, professional counsellors who have been specially trained in the scientific process of using psychological principles for assisting individuals in finding solutions to their problems are found to be of great importance in quality education.

Denga (1986) Egbochukwu (2008), Bulus (1992) portray guidance as a broad based programme available in schools, industries and society based on their needs. This

means that guidance is a programme which is made up of specific needs of individuals such as educational, personal, social, spiritual, moral and developmental needs. The guidance programme therefore, provides on the specific needs of students in schools or part – time programme or out of school system.

The objective of guidance and counselling in Nigerian education (2014) spelt out that guidance service is aimed primarily at preventing problems rather than solving them. It is a process of instilling and transmitting knowledge, values, skills, beliefs, norms and positive attitude from one generation to another. Denga describes standard and quality education as dealing with issues of relevance, validity, functional and efficiency of an educational system in the achievement of national goals and priorities. Denga (2004) further posits that quality education is the type of education which is relevant and adopt to the needs and aspirations of the society.

Guidance and counselling are regarded as a service to education which aims at helping students understand themselves in relations to their potential, talents, interests, aptitudes, vocation and other characteristics which are necessary for development. According to Salawu (2016), counselling is a process by means of which the helper expresses care and concern towards the person with a problem and facilitates that person's personal growth and brought change through self-knowledge. UNESCO (2002) in Adegoke (2011) states that "where there is no guidance and counselling, schools lose those children who are not able to cope with specific academic standard". Guidance and counselling services enhance students' performance, improve students' attitude as determinants, reduce students' problems and prepare them for the future tasks ahead.

The National Open University of Nigerian should act as a catalyst to stimulate excellence in the system and enhance its contribution to the development of the whole educational system through provision of quality education via an enhanced guidance and counselling services. The absence of quality education has led to what Agogo (2010) calls "downward spiral drive due to poor funding and poor quality control." It has affected tertiary institutions' output that is punctuated by many challenges.

### **The National Policy on Education and its Relevance for Guidance Services in Schools**

Any educational policy in a society is directed towards ultimately improving the quality of life of its members. It is specific in nature and provides ample room for direction. Edem (1982) cited in Ogbodo (2017), describes Educational Policy as thinking at a high level of abstraction, which expresses educational goals and the

means of achieving them. The National policy on education has identified one major means of achieving educational goals through guidance and counselling. This is a service that enables each learner in our institutions of learning to derive optimal educational benefit. This came to the limelight during the Nation's 1975-80 development plan as cited in Denga (2004). The plan was made to introduce guidance in the National education-training programme. As a follow up to this plan, the government aptly stated in the National Policy on Education of 1977 [revised in (2014)], that "in view of the apparent ignorance of many young people about career prospects and in view of personality maladjustment among school children, career officers and counsellors will be appointed in post-primary institutions". The Federal Ministry of Education in its attempt to implement fully the National Policy on Education introduced Counselling Services in all Federal Government Colleges otherwise called (Unity Schools) all over the country in 1977, 1986, 1988 and 2004 till date. The National Policy on Education (2004:p32), recognizes guidance and counselling as an educational service that will facilitate effective implementation of the education policy, make learning experience meaningful, hence lead to quality and success in the education pursuit. Ogbodo (2017) opined that Guidance and Counselling is a service that seeks to provide the students' opportunity to obtain holistic educational development that prepares students to functional life later.

Writing on the quality of counselling in Distance Learning, Caleb Kangui et al (2011) citing Tucker in (2013) as quoted in Ogbodo (2017), argue that Academic Guidance and Counselling is emerging as a crucial aspect of students' support services especially for distance education students. The current debate on student support services in general and Counselling in particular has redirected the attention of researchers in the following direction: "Do distance education students need counselling?", "should a distance education institution provide Counselling Services to its students?", "what are the Counselling needs of distance education students?". "What Counselling services should a distance education institution provide and how?"

### **What is Quality Education?**

Here, it is pertinent to define the word, 'quality' and 'education'. Quality, according to Oxford Dictionary is the degree of excellence of thing in terms of its worth. The word Education is defined as the development of character or mental power. To support the above definitions of quality and Education, Essien (2009) states that quality education is the education that enables the educated person to possess qualities of the mind and knowledge of the purpose of life and the twin requirement of an educational experience which is the ability to use the developed skills and knowledge. Quality education is the type of education that enables those

who acquire it to identify purposefully with goals, aspirations and needs of the society. Hence, education should not just be undergoing a course of study which is backed up with an award of a certificate or the acquisition of specific skills etc.

### **Quality Education/Quality Assurance and Guidance and Counselling in National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN)**

The purpose of Guidance and Counselling is to facilitate the development of excellence in all human life. No doubt it has been regarded as an integral part of the educational process. The recognition of the importance of it by Nigerian Federal Government informed the inclusion of the provision of guidance services in the National Policy on Education of (1977), revised (1981) and (2004). Thus Guidance and Counselling has been accepted as a viable tool in our educational system through which issues like academic, vocational, personal-social and psychological adjustment could be adequately addressed for quality education.

The National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) has seventy eight (78) Study Centres which are located in the State Capitals, major and important towns in all the six geo-political zones in the country as well as the Federal Capital Territory (Abuja) (Ogbodo, 2016). Some of these centres have permanent NOUN structures while others are situated within some selected Colleges of Education and Polytechnics premises. In the Model Study Centre, Abuja of NOUN, in addition to academic tutoring, Guidance and counselling services are provided by the University through her professional Counsellors with good learning materials. Every Study Centre has two (2) Counsellors who are always around to confer with students who seek needed guidance and counselling. The fact that some lecturers were professional Counsellors prior to their lecturing appointments make this service more effective.

To provide quality education, Igbafe (2009), as cited in Ogbodo (2017), stated in detail the philosophical foundation of educational counselling a learning oriented process carried out by a professionally competent counsellor with relevant psychological skills and knowledge, to assist the client with methods within context of the total personnel programme to learn more about herself, accept herself, and learn how to put such understanding into effect in relation to more clearly perceived, realistically defined goals, to enable the client become a happier and productive member of society.

However, for quality education, counsellors in National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) can utilize counselling theories and a set of advanced interpersonal skills which emphasize the process of counselling for effective communication. The world has become a global village with the aid of information technology; as the students' population is increasing yearly, the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN)

counsellors need to integrate various types of media such as mobile telephone, facebook, email, twitter, blogs, film strips, projectors etc into their counselling process.

### **Guidance Services rendered to Students in NOUN**

1. Academic counselling services
2. Vocational counselling services
3. Personal-social counselling services
4. Orientation services
5. Placement services
6. Information services
7. Career week programme
8. Appraisal/testing services
9. Cumulative record keeping services
10. Consultancy services
11. Excursion programmes
12. Referral services

Some of the major services will be discussed in this article as follows:

**Academic Counselling:** This is concerned with educational issues such as the selection of appropriate academic programmes, effective study habits, how to overcome excessive examination anxiety, how to achieve high grades etc. Every student needs academic counselling including the gifted student, the average student and the low achieving student. Effective academic counselling given to any category of student helps to improve the student's basic knowledge and skills and helps to make the most of his educational opportunities. An already screened, gifted student who is exposed to a more effective method of studying would definitely excel higher in academic performance. An underachieving student who is gradually exposed to academic skill Counselling will achieve better if he is committed and aims at realizing the expected goals of counselling service rendered. The counsellor should discourage students from choosing subjects purely for prestigious reasons. It is frustrating to choose a combination of pure Mathematics, Additional Mathematics and Physics if the student has no aptitude for them. The so-called soft options may turn out to be more rewarding to the student. Other problems of students which require academic counselling are poor or ineffective methods of studying, poor reading techniques, inability to cope with examinations among others.

**Vocational Counselling Service:** This involves a systematic study of students with a view to guiding them towards appropriate choice of careers or jobs. Its major

objectives is to assist students to have clear understanding of themselves, skills, interests, aptitudes and the occupational environment or how to adjust in their job opportunity etc. Vocational counselling is concerned with assisting the youth to choose appropriate occupations. During the careers week programme of the school, students are exposed to talks in different career areas by specialists in the various fields. Counsellors, in addition to the above, expose students to vocational interest inventories, which are standardized tests, which help to determine the occupation the student is best suited for. The achievement test scores of the students in different subjects also help in making decisions on the appropriate career. Making a decision for future career is often anxiety provoking because of the perceived finality of the decision (Denga, 1983 in Samb, 2009). Those who make wrong career choices often experience a sense of guilt later because of the belief that the decision should have been made more rationally. Counsellors are therefore involved in career choice and placement of students in areas where they will make the greatest contribution. This will no doubt help to achieve effective manpower development and regenerate our declining economy. The role of the guidance counsellor in this respect would be to assist in the identification of special talents among students by the use of psychological tests, so that they may take advantage of the increased range of career possibilities.

**Personal-social Counselling:** This deals with emotional issues that disturb the individual students and affect their studies adversely. It focuses on interpersonal concerns of students, the problems of life adjustment especially with family, fellow students, parents, wives, husbands, teachers, finance, lack, want, and other members of the society. Others include broken home, religious problems, drug addition, sex problem, negative self-concepts, etc. The above service deals with personal social and emotional issues that disturb the individual students and affect their studies adversely. Drug addiction, sex problems, broken homes, religious problems, inner moral conflicts and negative self concepts are among the major problems of youths that tend to militate against academic achievement in school.

Students at secondary school age are mostly affected by the societal changes as they move from their homes to the school environment and most of them are getting admission into National Open University because of their not being admitted into Conventional University. They are cut between parental values and the ideals. This is the stage in their life when they are faced with developmental and psychological problems due to sudden biological changes. They want independence and identity but are not yet equipped to face the world and all that it takes to be

free from parental interference. The guidance counsellor will help to clarify their values and goals to help them through this period of change and uncertainty so that they can make the most of their educational opportunity. Personal social guidance will eliminate general maladjustment and subsequent frustration among the nation's citizens.

**Orientation Services:** According to Ipaye (1986) in Ogbodo (2017), Orientation Service makes students feel emotionally secure while at the same time acquainting such students with the school and their school mates. Orientation Services are given to new students in groups. The purpose is to assist each student in his problem of getting adjusted to the school environment. Orientation generally helps individuals feel emotionally secure in a new setting. Proper orientation can also enhance the child's adjustment from one class to another or from one school to another.

A typical orientation programme in a secondary school should include a welcome address to new students by the principal and an introduction of the subject teachers and the authority figures in the school. Each subject teacher will briefly introduce his subject and its requirements. New students will be introduced to their prefects and the physical facilities available for their use in the school. Ideally, periodic orientation should also be held for students throughout their stay in the secondary school. Particular emphasis should be laid in the third year when the students are expected to move into the senior secondary school or branch out to vocational or trade school. The nature of orientation could be to acquaint the students with the various occupations open to them and which tally with their own talents, interest and aptitude. Parents and guardians should also benefit from such orientations from time to time to enable them guide their children appropriately. It should also be extended to new prefects, teachers and to the appropriate personnel for an all-round guidance programme. Alutu (2007) noted that as relevant as orientation service is, it is either neglected or not carried out appropriately and so fails to achieve its set goals in our institutions of learning.

**Placement Services:** The placement service is defined as taking the next step either into a higher level of education or into a job after completing a stage in education. The counsellor helps the youth to take the next right step that is tenable to them in terms of their abilities, aptitude and interests. Comprehensive and guidance-oriented information on individuals is necessary for any meaningful placement. The sources of these facets of information are from achievement tests, psychological tests and non-test techniques. The cumulative record folder of each student kept by the Counsellor should contain this information, which must of course be supplemented by a service of Counselling and personal interviews prior to actual placement. Data on psychological tests are obtained by administering intelligence

and aptitude tests. The careers branch of the Federal Ministry of Education started administering such tests to JS 3 students in 1988 till date. The results of such tests were quite useful in carrying out the placement of students into Science, Arts, and Commercial and Technical options in the Senior Secondary School. Information on personal-social, emotional or religious issues should be given to students when the need arises. The nature of information will suggest how it will be communicated to the students - on the bulletin board, recorded in film and tapes, read in the school news or communicated to parents.

### **The Duties of the Counsellors in the NOUN Study Centres**

- i. Implementing polices on guidance and counselling.
- ii. Developing counselling materials to enhance the competence of counsellors.
- iii. Monitoring guidance and counselling services in all NOUN centers.
- iv. Liaising with the Information Communication Programme (TCP), Tutors Mark Assignment (TMA), Pen or Pencil (POP) and Electronic – Exam.
- v. Liaising with the NOUN management on the training of guidance counsellors
- vi. Organizing workshops and seminars for counsellors to improved their performance on the job.
- vii. Publishing the guidance and counselling journal.
- viii. Evaluating guidance programme for improvement and consolidation.
- ix. Preparing and administering psychological test in the noun study centres
- x. Designing programmes in the field of careers, vocational tests development and informational service.
- xi. Organizing seminars and workshops for NOUN staff and students on current issues.
- xii. Offering professional assistance to NOUN lecturers, teacher's referrals and general public.

### **Recommendations**

This paper therefore suggests that effective delivery of guidance and Counselling services requires that the NOUN management should support the practicing counsellors, morally and financially, by creating Guidance and Counselling offices in all the 78 study centres and head office and a staff designated to the office for effectiveness. The unit should be different from the Department of Guidance and Counselling in the Faculty of Education, providing adequate office accommodation with equipment should be provided. Therefore:

- i. National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) should encourage Counsellors

to develop psychological testing, cumulative record folders, and writing books for student/staff etc.

- ii. National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) and all stakeholders should embark on awareness drives to bring the services close to all their students and staff.
- iii. National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) should train more Counsellors through seminars, workshops and conferences to meet demand and challenges.
- iv. Good budgeting for funding the Counselling services in National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) etc.
- v. The counselling unit should have their official library for students' references.
- vi. A minimum of three professional counsellors should be employed in each of the NOUN centres.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has carefully examined the concept of quality education, guidance and counselling from different perspectives; the involvement of National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) in guidance and counselling services and the extent in which guidance and counselling services enhance students' performances, quality/standard of education and by extension, national growth. The position of National Policy on Education of 2014 in support of this service is also highlighted. In the light of this, it is concluded that the role of guidance and counselling is very critical to achieving quality and standard education especially as offered by National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN).

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