

Guidance and Counselling: An Indispensable Support Service in Nigerian Primary Education

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the dynamics of primary education curriculum, which implies consistent relevant changes designed to cope with emerging problems, either identified or anticipated, in the guidance of primary schools. Such measures are taken to cope with changes that have existed in the objectives, contents and administration of primary education in the past several years of Nigerian educational history. This paper therefore focuses on the relevance of guidance and counselling in primary schools. The paper discusses the relevance/rationale for primary school guidance and the place of guidance and counselling in the educational setting. The need for primary school guidance and counselling is also highlighted, with an exposition on the principles underlying primary education guidance programme. The paper also discusses the purposes, objectives and goals of primary school guidance and counselling; integrating primary school guidance into the curriculum; nature of primary school child; role of government in promoting guidance and counselling services; and need to integrate guidance and counselling into the primary school curriculum. The article concludes with suggestions on how to harmonize guidance and counselling programme into primary school curriculum.

Keywords: guidance and counselling services, Nigerian primary schools, objectives, pupils, teacher

Introduction

There is a Jewish proverb which states that “a person who has no destination in mind does not bother about choosing a particular road because any road he chooses can take him to some destination”. This means that teaching must be properly focused on well set out and realizable objectives as delivery destination. Curriculum has been defined by Denga (2004:480) as “the learning experience and teaching strategies organized by the school to bring about desired outcome in the learner”. Curriculum contains the statement of aims and

specific or behavioural objectives which cover both curricular and co-curricular experiences organized by the school.

Relevance/rationale for primary school guidance

The presence of numerous delinquent adolescents in secondary schools, in the universities and society, who are involved in all sorts of criminal activities like armed robbery, rape, murder, bullying, examination malpractice, substance abuse, among others, indicate the existence of human failure after primary education. Early guidance is therefore essential for the prevention of such failure (Alutu, 2007).

Primary school counsellors should therefore be concerned with prevention as well as remediation of problems and emotional deviations of children. Classroom teachers/counsellors should deter or prevent human suffering. Primary school guidance is equally concerned with the growth and development of children; this means that primary school guidance is developmental. Teachers or counsellors help pupils to develop their potential. They need to help the children in primary school to overcome their frustration so that they can thrive socially, emotionally, physically, psychologically and intellectually, in a normal manner. To achieve this, classroom teachers should plan and execute a programme of guidance for children (Ijeh et al., 2012).

The place of Guidance and Counselling in the educational process

In order to fully achieve the aims of education earlier enumerated, within and outside the school system, guidance and counselling should go along with learning for maximum achievement. Guidance, according to Shertzer and Stone (1976), in Ogbodo-Adoga (2017), is defined as "a process of helping individuals to understand themselves and their world." Zeran and Riccio (1962), cited in Ogbodo-Adoga (2019a), defined guidance as a process, developmental in nature, by which an individual is assisted to understand, accept and utilize his abilities, aptitudes, interests and attitudinal patterns in relation to his aspirations.

Guidance can thus be seen as an integral part of the educational process in which the student is aided to understand himself, his abilities, his interests and his goals. He thus attains self-understanding, self-insight, motivation, aspiration and the acquisition of decision-making skills. Guidance helps the student to view his behaviour realistically. The major purpose of guidance is to facilitate the personal development of students. It is an on-going process in the educational career of a student and so must be available at all stages of the educational process.

Counselling on the other hand can be defined as a process in which one person assists another person in a person-to-person or face-to-face encounter. Although counselling is a part of guidance programme, it is a more personalized process. It does not confine itself to information giving but deals more intensely with personal and emotional issues. It is more private and confidential than general guidance. Counselling helps an individual to take an honest look at himself, become aware of his potentialities and weaknesses, consider alternatives in the light of existing facts and information and then make his own decisions. Counselling aids growth, independent thinking and self-reliance (Ogbodo-Adoga, 2019b).

The need for primary school Guidance and Counselling

The early grades are crucial in an individual's development. Supporting this stance, Kegan and Moss (1964), Cottingham, (1970), in Mkpa (1998) cited in Ogbodo-Adoga (2020) indicated that during ages 4 to 10, development induces changes in the child's behavioural organization which has great significance for guidance in primary school. The first four years of children's first contact with the school, and peer culture, according to Kegan and Moss (1964), Okobiah and Okorodudu (2004), result in permanent behaviour changes which last through early adulthood. Some serious problems, which begin before secondary school age, have necessitated designing services which will help the primary school teachers to recognize and resolve them. This has accentuated the need for primary school guidance and counselling.

It is very vital to identify and remedy problems early enough. In addition to these identified and remediation functions, children's continuous and maximum development is equally important. This guidance programme does not negate the corrective aspects of guidance. It rather prevents a child from errors of career choice because of the lack of the guidance programme which the school should provide to complement its instructional function. Development guidance and the designed curriculum are tailored towards bestowing on children a sense of self-esteem, responsibility, making decision and problem solving. If children's developmental needs are met and their problems resolved, many adolescent delinquencies and deviant behaviours will be prevented (Okobiah & Okorodudu, 2004).

The policy on education has not provided for professional counsellor to be deployed to primary schools. This will consequently jeopardize the holistic development of these children. Therefore, there is a more urgent need today for all the states in Nigeria to appoint counsellors or teacher-counsellors in all primary schools. Since many schools do not have guidance programme, the appointed guidance personnel should, as a matter of importance, plan and execute this guidance programme in primary schools. Formation should begin in

primary schools. It is the primary school counsellor or teacher who should promote the development of good character, values, habits and attitudes (Okobiah & Okorodudu, 2004).

Principles underlying primary school education programme

Certain major psychological principles undergird primary school guidance. They are adapted and summarized from Cottingham (1970), in Mkpa (1998), cited in Ogbodo-Adoga, (2017), as follows:

- i. The teacher provides and the counsellor facilitates the guidance programme.
- ii. Guidance focuses on the individual's assets, abilities and potentialities.
- iii. Developmental guidance encourages pupils and builds their self-confidence.
- iv. Cooperative guidance programme is the most effective because it involves the teachers, counsellor, headmistresses/headmasters and the community (Ogodo-Adoga, 2017).

Purposes, objectives and goals of primary school Guidance and Counselling

The functionality and effectiveness of primary school guidance is appraised in terms of the goals, objectives and purposes of primary school guidance, according to Okafor (2017). The necessity for the establishment of purposes and objectives of primary school guidance is obvious and does not need to be overemphasized. Among the purposes of primary school guidance are the following:

- i. Facilitation of the child's learning.
- ii. Modification of the child's teacher's, and parent's attitudes, habits, and behaviours.
- iii. Knowledge and understanding of oneself and others.
- iv. Development of self-acceptance and acceptance of others, and development of self-concept, and self-confidence.
- v. Development of methods of solving developmental tasks of life.
- vi. Development of increased self-direction, problem solving and decision-making skills.
- vii. Development of responsibility for choices and decisions.
- viii. Modification of faulty concepts and convictions.
- ix. To assist teacher/counsellors to meet all students' intellectual, personal and social needs.
- x. To enhance pupils' self-understanding.
- xi. To encourage the adaptation of the guidance programme to specific need, purposes, interests and maturity.
- xii. To promote early identification of pupils' weaknesses, strengths, talents, abilities or deviations.

- xiii. To provide developmental, preventive or remedial guidance and counselling, consequent to identification of developmental problems.
 - xiv. To increase the teachers'/counsellors' awareness and sensitivity towards the needs, goals, and purposes of children.
 - xv. To aid the teachers'/counsellors' utilization of psychological principles, learning and child development principles for effective classroom guidance.
 - xvi. To stimulate the teachers', counsellors' and other staff's study, and utilization of guidance techniques in their provision of guidance services.
- The onus of achieving the listed objectives lies on the teacher or counsellor who uses them to plan and evaluate the guidance programme (Okafor, 2017).

Integrating primary school Guidance into the curriculum

In the light of the need for curriculum improvement, and given the obvious academic and social problems of the Nigerian primary school child, it has become not only desirable but imperative that the primary school curriculum should immediately create room for guidance services. More specifically, this paper examines the current trend in the primary school curriculum in order to show how little emphasis is laid on organized guidance services, the nature of the primary school child as a basis for establishing the need to integrate guidance programmes into the curriculum. Finally, the procedures for ensuring the integration in a sustained manner will be established (Nwachukwu, 2013).

Nature of primary school child

The nature of the primary school child as he grows and develops through the years suggests the need for integrating guidance services in the primary school system. In terms of social development, the primary school child is influenced by three major forces – the family, peers and the school. The family exerts the first major influence by communicating with the child. The parents, at the early years, communicate role expectations to the child and assist him to adjust to the demands of independence existent in the school. Parental guidance and support are a major influence upon achievement as the child progresses. Peer influence begins to manifest, cliques are formed on the basis of sex, age, and interests. Extreme energy is expended in physical activities. The school creates a new environment for the child and teachers continue to assist the child to develop along socially acceptable ways (Okobiah & Okorodudu, 2004).

In emotional development, the primary school child is increasingly sensitive to criticism and ridicule. He seeks a warm and friendly relationship with adults. Worries are more evident regarding self-esteem and threat to security. In terms of physical development, girls tend to grow more rapidly than boys. The girls begin adolescent growth spurts toward the

end of primary school life. There is improved motor development and coordination especially for boys, who excel in physical achievement. Changes in the body may be inadequately handled if people are not properly counselled (Okobiah & Okorodudu, 2004).

The developmental characteristics of a child have implications for guidance and counselling services. The National Policy on Education (1981), cited in Ogbodo-Adoga (2017), makes a statement that supports guidance and counselling services in primary schools. The policy recognizes the importance of counselling services in the schools but in practice, hardly do primary schools possess such personnel. It would seem that government's appreciation of the importance of counselling services is limited to the secondary school because once personality conflicts and educational/learning problems are resolved at that educational level, a firm foundation is laid for success at higher levels of education.

Counsellors are needed to tackle a variety of socio-personal and academic problems of the pupils. Socio-personal problems and conflict situations result in indiscipline among the pupils. Diverse learning problems also exist among them. Many pupils have problems of reading; there are very slow readers, many are unable to comprehend easily what they read, some are unable to identify main points in a passage and so cannot summarize ideas. Other problems include lack of concentration, that is, divided attention while reading, day dreaming, inability to remember or retain what is learned, difficulty in planning private studies, poor use of available time, sleepiness during studies, inability to prepare for examinations, wrong choice of examination questions, poor organization of written answers during examinations, lack of motivation to study, and in general, poor study habits (Federal Ministry of Education, 1999).

Role of government in promoting Guidance and Counselling services

The government's role in promoting education has already been highlighted and guidance and counselling falls within educational services – an arm of education. It then follows that the government has a responsibility of promoting guidance and counselling. This is evident in the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004), cited in Ogbodo-Adoga (2019c), which stated under Educational Service 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 counselors will be appointed in post-primary institutions. Since qualified personnel in this category are scarce, government will continue to make provisions for the training of interested teachers in Guidance and Counselling." Also, in the policy under Counselling Services, it states, "A number of teachers are now undergoing in-service training in this area and more will be trained in the future." From these, it can be seen that

the Federal Government recognizes the dearth of guidance counsellors. According to Okafor (2017), the government has the following roles:

i. Formulating policies and guidelines

Guidance and Counselling as an educational enterprise needs to be backed by policies and guidelines for its effective organization and uniformity of practice. As the government formulates policies for general education, it should be done in case of Guidance and Counselling by the appropriate bodies or arms of government.

ii. Training of Guidance Counsellors

Guidance is a function of every member of the educational team, but the responsibility for leadership is one of the primary functions of the school counsellor. Guidance counsellors are the key personnel in administering guidance and counselling in schools.

Counsellors assist the students to:

i. Plan their educational endeavours, career prospects, personal and social development

ii. Develop healthy habits and positive attitudes and values

iii. Develop an awareness of the world of work by disseminating educational and career information

iv. Acquire a better understanding of the world of work through the acquisition of skills and attitudes and participation in work-related programmes

v. Participate in school activities with a view to increasing their effectiveness in personal and social activities

vi. Adjust to new environments

vii. Understand their strengths, weaknesses, interests, values, potentialities and limitations.

In general, the counsellor carries out counselling services with students on matters of self-understanding, decision-making using both the interview and group discussions while guidance focuses on providing information for an individual or groups. The school counsellor is not only responsible to the students but also to parents, staff members and the community in general. Parents are made aware of their children's aptitudes, abilities, interests and attitudes in relation to educational and career planning, achievement at school and personal-social development.

The teacher is so engrossed in the academic achievement of the students that the counsellor's role in finding out the child's total developmental pattern is not out of place in the school system. The counsellors are the ones readily available to supply parents with information relevant to the guidance programme of the school and the services available to all. Parents are reached by the counsellors at the Parent Teacher's Association meeting, group and

individual discussions and through correspondence. The counsellors work with members of staff in a cordial and friendly manner to achieve the goal of educating and developing the students towards individual fulfillment. Cooperation of counsellors and staff in the following areas aids the achievement of the earlier stated goal:

- i. Development of a curriculum that caters for the individual differences of the students.
- ii. Co-ordination of student appraisal by compiling information in the cognitive, affective and psycho-motor domains.
- iii. Co-ordinating the use of services available in the school and the community and getting teachers involved in these services (Okafor, 2017).

The role of the counsellor has been enumerated to enable the appreciation of the rationale behind the training of guidance counsellors for schools. The Federal Government has taken the lead of training counsellors both for the Federal and State schools. The problem is the rate of expansion for schools especially with the government policy that all children must have primary education. With the introduction of the 6-3-3-4 system and UBE, the services of the Guidance Counsellors become needed more than ever before. The Counsellor is needed to administer psychological tests, score and interpret as he is the person capable of doing this correctly by virtue of his training. The counsellor is required to use the results of the psychological tests as well as standardized achievement tests, in Okobiah and Okorodudu (2004), as:

- i. Streaming students into vocational, technical and academic areas at the end of the junior secondary school as required by the system
- ii. Carrying out placement services
- iii. Guiding them into career clusters from where a choice eventually emerges.

Need to integrate Guidance and Counselling into the primary school curriculum

The need to integrate guidance and counselling into the curriculum of primary schools has become more obvious now than was the case in the past. According Alutu (2007), Ijeh et al. (2012), Nwachukwu (2013), Ogbodo-Adoga (2019b), the importance of taking care of the child's all-round development is obvious. The trained counsellor must now be fully employed to monitor trends in the learners' intellectual, socio-psychological, emotional and physical development in order to be able to detect when there is need for intervention; for it is said that a stitch in time saves nine. Any identified problems should be quickly addressed in order to prevent more serious development in the future.

The nature of modern society is so complex, and so full of contradictions that the child is often unable to reconcile the values taught in school with the reality of the contemporary world outside the school. This contradiction compels the learner to be uncertain about what value to accept and live by. He therefore needs the services of the guidance counsellor to help him choose the best way to live, to solve his daily problems and cope with varieties of conflicting situations.

In addition, there is the need to lay a solid academic foundation for the child at the primary school level. The activities of the guidance counsellors are indispensable in establishing that foundation. How best then should guidance programme be integrated into the primary school curriculum in a sustained manner?

Procedure for integrating Guidance programme into the primary school curriculum

There is a strong need to train guidance counsellors specially for primary schools for obvious reasons. Since primary school children differ from secondary and tertiary level ones in a number of ways, counsellors need to be specially prepared to cope with the varieties of learner characteristics, needs, problems and interests at the primary level of education. Products of the training programme should therefore be deployed to the primary schools to undertake full time jobs as professionals (Okafor, 2017). Those professionals already trained conventionally may also be posted to primary school where they are expected to function. However, there is the need to re-orientate them toward being able to cope with the demands of primary school counselling services. Workshops and seminars which seek to effect the desired re-orientation should be encouraged and conducted periodically.

Conclusion

In conclusion, educational development has become necessary for primary schools to enjoy the services of guidance counsellors on a permanent basis. The traditional system wherein teachers combined the roles of teaching and occasional counselling is no more satisfactory. The training, employment and effective utilization of professional counsellors call for immediate intervention by various governments of the states. The need has become urgent if the noble goals of primary education in Nigeria are to be attained.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are proffered by the researcher towards ensuring an effective presence of guidance counsellor services in primary school:

- i. While in school, the professional guidance counsellor should have a conducive environment to function at his best. He needs an office space, and a variety of materials that should facilitate the successful execution of his job.

- ii. Children in primary school should be encouraged to take advantage of the availability of the counsellor to have their problems sorted out. They need to develop confidence in the counsellor so as to create an enabling environment for him to do his job effectively. It is only when there is the confidence that the children's problems can be solved.
- iii. It is important for the school to create a definite time for the pupils to consult with the counsellor. At the stipulated time, pupils with various problems should proceed to see the counsellor in order to have their problems solved. Such time should however be flexible.
- iv. If possible, more than one counsellor should be deployed to school with a large population.

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