

SCHOOL-BASED COUNSELLING: A PANACEA FOR ADJUSTMENT PROBLEMS AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

School-based counselling is an important part of schools' total educational programme. It is one of the most prevalent forms of counselling offered to help alleviate adjustment problems among secondary school students. Though most schools do not have access to Professional Guidance Counsellors in Nigeria, its importance as an effective educational support service is not in doubt. This paper therefore draws attention on school-based counselling: A panacea for adjustment problems among secondary school students in Nigeria. The paper employs a qualitative research design focused on the need for school-based counselling, parameters of school-based counselling, case examples of how school-based counselling was used to address adjustment problems among students and professional counsellors' role in helping students to overcome adjustment problems through school-based counselling. It was suggested, amongst others, that the Federal Government of Nigeria should make it compulsory for all the 36 States of the Federation including the Federal Capital Territory to engage the services of professional counsellors in all her secondary schools across the nation so that all students should be able to have free access to the services of professional counsellors. The national assembly should promulgate a law to back the above recommendation. Through these ways, school-based counselling will be given the rightful place it deserves in our school system to help troubled students to overcome their problems.

Keywords: *Adjustment Problems, Panacea, School-based Counselling, Students.*

INTRODUCTION

School-based counselling is a professional activity delivered by qualified counselling practitioners at different levels of education. Qualified

counsellors offer troubled or distressed children and young people an opportunity to explore and understand their difficulties within a relationship of agreed confidentiality in schools.

School counselling has been an immeasurable education support service for students who are troubled and those experiencing emotional, psychological, career challenges and other diverse challenges. School-based counselling is one of the most popular forms of counselling for secondary school students making counselling affordable to young students who may not have access to professional counselling services ordinarily.

The government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria saw the importance of school-based counselling and made an official statement about counselling for the first time in the history of Nigeria gazetted in her National Policy on Education, (1977) and maintained same in the National Policy on Education, (2004) in section 11 sub-section 8 in the following statement:

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 shall be appointed in post-primary institutions. Since qualified personnel in this category are scarce, government shall continue to make provisions for the training of interested teachers in guidance and counselling. Guidance and counselling shall also feature in teacher education programmes. Proprietors of schools shall provide guidance counsellors in adequate number in each primary and post-primary school.

Osiki, (2018) reacting to this statement says that school-based counselling was merely perceived erroneously as an adjunct activity and as a service that any teacher or anybody within the school system could safely offer to cater for the career needs of learners. For Osiki, school-based counselling is limited in scope by this statement. However, there was re-thinking about school-based counselling in NPE (2013) section 127, sub-section (vi) under guidance and counselling the Federal Government of Nigeria changed its position and made some affirmative statements in the following excerpts:

- (a) Government shall continue to provide for the training of teachers in guidance and counselling.
- (b) Establish and equip:
 - (i) Counselling clinics, career resource centres
 - (ii) Information centres
- (c) Proprietors of schools shall provide adequate number of guidance counsellors for their institution. In sub-section vii and viii of the document, it further stated that Voluntary Counselling and Testing (VCT) referral services and the provision of care and support for those infected and affected by HIV/AIDS should be part of counsellors' functions.

The above action of government in essence speaks volume of governments' willingness to provide school-based counselling in Nigeria school system. Unfortunately, there is no consistency between policy statements and actions.

Years after the pronouncement of this laudable programme in our school system the implementation is still far from being actualised across the country. Most schools cannot boast of a school counsellor. The Federal Government only did her own part by ensuring that all unity schools across the nation benefit from school-based counselling by ensuring that professional counsellors are posted to all such schools. Unfortunately, the Federal Government did not enforce the implementation of this policy in all the 36 States' owned government schools and private schools. Most students in state government owned schools and private schools grope in the dark without enjoying the services of school-based counselling. In Rivers State for instance, most students are not familiar with the word "counselling" and cannot enjoy the full benefits school counselling has to offer. School-based counselling is a good panacea to addressing adjustment problems among secondary school students which in essence makes the teaching and learning enterprise beneficial to the learner, teacher and the society at large.

The Need for School-based Counselling

There is need for school-based counselling in all the three tiers of the education sectors in Nigeria (primary, secondary and tertiary) though our concern in this paper is the secondary school sector. Nwachukwu (2007) explains that the fundamental reason for

school counselling is that every human being experience growth and developmental needs for help at one stage or another. The learner needs this extra help in order to make the best out of his/her educational opportunities. School-based counselling helps the learner to achieve the following;

5. Removing barriers to academic achievement
6. Supporting social, psychological and emotional development of students
7. Guiding students to realistic choice of careers/tertiary educations.

The major need of students at the secondary school level is ego identity. The ego affirmation of the personhood of the adolescent is more important to him/her than his/her grades. The secondary school age is synonymous with the adolescent period which is the restive and turbulent age characterised by storm and stress arising from transition from childhood, uncertainty of adulthood and the accompanying hormonal physical and psycho-social adjustments. Guidance and counselling is an essential tool of help to the learner at this stage of growth and chronological age of development. Iruloh, Ernest-Ehibudu and Echebe, (2009) supporting this view states that, for teaching and learning processes to be productive or functional the psychological state of the teacher and learner becomes very important. The nature of learning and the conditions

under which learning takes place are also important. Students can never benefit from learning if they are emotionally unstable.

Students' emotional state, level of motivation, interest, self-concept, self-belief etc. are all factors that can cause poor academic performance. On the other hand, an emotionally disturbed teacher who is also passing through some psychological trauma or disturbance cannot be productive in carrying out his/her duties, this in turn will affect the teaching/learning output. This also calls for the need for school base counselling which can adequately address such issues. Again, when children leave home for secondary school, they find it difficult to adjust in a new environment. Often times they are faced with emotional and academic problems. Such problems could be frustrating and may lead to eventual withdrawal from school. All these make the need for school base counselling imperative.

The current system of education run by the Nigerian state calls for the need for school-based counselling. The 9-3-4 free and compulsory Universal Basic Education (UBE) is aimed at ensuring that every Nigerian child attains at least 9 years of formal education. Kpolovie, (2012) explains that to achieve the purported aim, the 9-3-4 reform retrogressively demoted Junior Secondary School back to primary school as an extension of literacy and numeracy education under the control

of Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC), Kpolovie further explained that the reform also pretended to have made primary and secondary education compulsory and universal in Nigeria in such a manner that every school child is provided breakfast, lunch, uniforms, books, computers and every other thing required for schooling. This education reform caused population explosion in secondary schools as many schools admitted more students than their capacity could carry. As the number of students increased so also were the problems encountered by these students. This new reform brought into the school normal, maladjusted, gifted, talented, handicapped children from diverse backgrounds (Oladele in Uzoeshi, 2013). School counselling is therefore needed for the proper adjustment of all students irrespective of their background. School-based counselling assist students by evaluating their abilities, interest and personalities to develop realistic academic and career goals for harmonious living with self and others in the environment he/she finds him/herself. The need for school base counselling as enumerated above is not exhaustive, With the above reasons advanced, it is not out of place to say that, there is a dare need for school-based counselling in our secondary schools to arrest adjustment problems that may be confronting students for proper growth and development.

Parameters of School-based Counselling

Basically school-based counselling is divided into three core areas, although each area complements the other in helping a client solve his/her problems, these core areas are:

- (1) Educational Counselling
- (2) Vocational/Career Counselling
- (3) Personal/Social Counselling

The area of concern a client presents will determine the kind of counselling he/she would receive. We shall briefly discuss each of these areas.

Educational Guidance and Counselling

Uzoeshi, (2013) analysing educational guidance and counselling services posit that, educational guidance and counselling relates to educational issues especially with regard to success in education, educational furtherance and making effective choices. In fact, educational guidance deals with every issue related to schooling and its outcome. Every individual needs educational guidance in order to make right subject selection and to overcome pressures in making educational decisions. It also helps students to avoid unnecessary peer group pressure in subject and career selection. It creates awareness in students on certain subject requirements for certain courses in the University. In educational guidance and

counselling the following areas amongst others are emphasised to help students overcome their adjustment problems,

5. Selection of right subject combination
6. Developing effective study habit/reading skills
7. Overcoming examination anxiety
8. Passing exams with high grades
9. Making effective use of the library
10. Knowledge of entry qualification into educational institutions etc (Uzoeshi, 2013)

Olusakin, (2011) in consonance with the view of Uzoeshi elaborated further that educational guidance and counselling helps students to improve their academic performance by identifying the obstacles students face and then devising ways to overcome them. It offers students help with regard to educational planning and direction.

Vocational Guidance and Counselling

Many students have difficulties in deciding what career would be the best for them. Vocational counselling constitutes one of the services in a range of strategies that can be used in order to ensure a better fit between education and the world of work. Vocational counselling could lead to the optimal use of people's skills and abilities which is the best strategy to ensure

economic and national development (Adegoke, 2004; Ahime & Olusakin, 2008). It is a common trend in secondary schools for students to choose careers based on peer or parental influences. With proper vocational guidance, students can be helped to choose careers that match their talents and interest without any external pressure. Vocational counselling needs in secondary schools includes amongst others;

- (a) Choosing a career that match one's talent
- (b) Making realistic and appropriate vocational choices
- (c) Choosing careers of one's interest
- (d) Developing effective job-hunting skills
- (e) Hazards of every occupation (Uzoeshi, 2013)

In essence vocational guidance centres on the world of work, it assists students to make realistic and wise career choices in life with the needs of the society.

Personal/Social Guidance and Counselling

This category is concerned with problems that are personal, social and psychological which an individual may not like to share with others. Uzoeshi, (2013) affirms that some of these problems are confidential to the individual that he/she may only share

them with trusted few. Some of these problems include;

- (i) Low self-concept
- (ii) Poor inter-personal relationship
- (iii) Drug abuse
- (iv) Lesbianism
- (v) homosexuality
- (vi) Juvenile delinquency, amongst other.

Any of these guidance and counselling activities in school can be given in small groups, large groups, individually or as a school counselling core curriculum lesson in classes. They can be remedial or preventive in approach or as an enhancement counselling. Upon these parameters lies school-based counselling.

Case examples of how school-based counselling helped in students' adjustment problems

Case 1 – The Case of Tokuala (real names withheld for purpose of confidentiality)

Tokuala a JSS3 female student, age 14 and the only child of her parents, walked into the counsellors' office looking sad and worried. The school counsellor who is the researcher greeted her and offered her a seat, as soon as she sat down tears started rolling down from her eyes. The counsellor offered her tissue without saying a word to her, she was allowed to cry to her satisfaction, after which she asked "can I talk to you?" I hope no one will hear

what I will tell you? yes of course, you must have eased your tension by now? it helps to get this off your chest says the counsellor. The counsellor assured her of confidentiality and she presented her matter in these exact words,

This morning I don't know what my mummy did, my daddy used his head and hit her on the face and she started bleeding seriously before I was forced by my dad to go to school although I didn't want to come to school this morning because of this. I'm still thinking of my mummy, I don't really know if she is okay, I cannot concentrate in class, I can still picture the whole scene, my mummy was bleeding from her nose and mouth, I want to go home.

This problem presented by the client is a personal-social problem impinging on her educational adjustment. The girl was accompanied home by the counsellor after making her to understand that the father will not allow her mum to die as she is alleging, but certainly he will take her to the hospital for medical attention. The counselling process also involved parents of the client at different sessions who were made to understand that parental wrangling exhibited before children affects their educational development and should be avoided. Three sessions were held with the girl and four sessions with the parents. They apologised to their daughter and promised her that they will live in harmony from henceforth.

Case 2: The Case of Thomas

Thomas was 15 years old and in SS2, his father walked into the counsellor's office with him. The counsellor greeted and established good rapport with them and asked "how may I help you? The father presented his problem in the following words;

Thomas is my first son and I want him to offer Physics, and further maths because he will be an engineer, I'm surprised after this instruction he still did not offer further maths and physics. I just discovered this as I came to pick his result, there is no further maths or physics, I approach the further maths and physics teachers and they said they have never seen Thomas in their classes. Counsellor please help me talk to this boy, else I will not be part of anything about his education again.

The counsellor took a deep breath and asked Thomas, did you hear your father? What do you have to say?" Thomas replied I cannot offer Further Mathematics because I'm even struggling with Maths, I told my father and he is still insisting that I must offer Further Mathematics and Physics, I don't even like Physics, I'm not interested and I cannot do it, if I do it and fail he will blame me as if I'm not serious.

The counsellor requested for Thomas' terminal result and discovered that, Thomas was actually struggling with General Mathematics and his father wants him to go further by offering Further Mathematics. This is indeed

ironical, his Mathematics score is just on the board line and his scores in Economics, Geography, English, Accounting, Marketing, Civil education were quite good. The counsellor asked Thomas to go back to his class while she had a session with his father. At the end of the day Thomas' father was made to understand that Thomas may not excel in Engineering as he is proposing, rather he will excel and do very well in accounting, marketing, banking and finance and other related courses. He was encouraged to support the boy to offer subjects he has flair for because no career is superior to the other. All careers contribute to societal growth. One can excel and make impact in any field of choice, resist the temptation to cast aspersion on your child for choosing any career he/she prefer. Thorough counselling was done for him to appreciate the boy's choice. Thomas was counselled to focus on his strength and make his father proud through excellent academic performance.

This problem is an educational problem impinging on career. School counselling was able to address this adjustment problem to the advantage of the student.

Case 3: The Case of Ruth

Ruth was 16 years old and in SS3, she walked into the counsellor's office one morning with all amount of seriousness without greeting the counsellor, the counsellor greeted her with a smile but she was too serious to smile back she

was offered a seat and made to relax, suddenly, she exploded in these words; My dad wants me to read law but I don't like Law, I want to read International Relations while my second choice is Mass Communication. I don't even have any plan for Law. He wants me to change to Law, Aunty, please talk to my father. She immediately handed over the father's number to the counsellor. The counsellor counselled her to remain focused on her strength and interest. A look at her result shows that she is very good in all her subjects as an Art student.

The father was invited for counselling he remained resolute on his decision. I tell you the highly educated ones prove more difficult in such matters than the less educated. The counsellor used all her counselling skills to bear, at the end of the day he conceded to support her choice.

The 3 cases presented above have vividly illustrated how school counselling can address students' adjustment problems in all areas of school counselling. Absence of school counselling would have made most children to live unfulfilled dreams.

What should professional counsellors do to help students overcome adjustment problems?

A professional counsellor practicing in a school system should have a good knowledge of counselling theories which provide simplified models for understanding the ways of acting for both the client and the counsellor.

Counselling theories help the counsellor to understand how to perceive a client and decide what to do. They may also provide client ideas for what to think and do differently. Olusakin, (2012) believes that, the counsellor cannot merely do what he/she likes, there must be a rationale and method guiding the counsellor's behaviours and responses. Each individual is unique with particular characteristic ways of thinking, feeling and dealing with the world. A counsellor with a good knowledge of counselling theories will subscribe to a particular school of thought or go eclectic in employing the most effective and useful ways of resolving the presenting problem.

Secondly, the counsellor should also have knowledge of counselling skills and techniques in handling students' problems. Effective application of counselling techniques and skills makes counselling easier and the outcome rewarding. Some of the counselling techniques includes; rapport, empathy, listening, responding, encouraging, confrontation, restatement, silence, catharsis amongst others (Hackney & Corner, 2005).

Thirdly, assessing or defining of the presenting problem. It is important to access problems in more than one way to avoid the constraints of personal bias or theoretical encapsulation. This also includes thinking of the problem in the clients' social context as well as in a theoretical context.

Fourthly, identify and set goals. Setting goals is very important to the success of counselling outcome. Hackney, *et al.*, (2005) explains that some clients and even counsellors are resistant to this step. The act of setting a goal involves making a commitment to a set of conditions, a course of action or an outcome-counsellors should be committed to goal setting in the counselling process.

Fifthly, counsellors should initiate intervention strategy on how their goals can be accomplish. There are many theories in use, choose the appropriate one fit for the problem at hand, though not all intervention strategies work with all clients. If your choice is not working out reevaluate the problem and change your strategy.

Lastly, plan termination and follow up. As the client begins to accomplish the goals that had been set, it becomes apparent that the counselling session should be terminated and follow up appointment be made in advance to access the gains of counselling

Through these ways school counsellors should be able to give invaluable help to their clients for maximum growth and development.

Conclusion

School-based counselling has been shown to be a very effective support service for many students who are troubled. The intention of the Federal Republic of Nigeria expressed in the national policy of education to make school-based counselling available to

all students has not shown much success as many secondary schools across the nation still lag behind without professional counsellors. This has denied many students access to school base counselling. Many troubled students in our secondary schools are distressed without any access to the much-needed support from school-based counselling services in their schools. Students' encounter educational, vocational and personal-social challenges which school counselling programmes need to address to promote personal growth of students for a successful living. School-based counselling is an important part of schools' total educational programme and should be made available to all students across the nation.

Recommendations

Based on the position of this paper the following recommendations were made;

(1) The federal government of Nigeria should make it compulsory for all the 36 States of the Federation, including the Federal Capital Territory to engage the services of professional counsellors in all her secondary schools so that all students should be able to access the services of a professional counsellor in school.

(2) A special law should be promulgated by the National Assembly to back (1) above

(3) A special workshop should be organised for all the Governors of the 36 States on the need for school-based counselling services in secondary schools.

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