

NEED FOR GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING AT THE PRIMARY SCHOOL LEVEL: EARLY INTERVENTION STRATEGIES FOR SCHOOL CHILDREN

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ABSTRACT: *Nigeria is a third world country with rich cultural heritage and background. At the early stages of children's growth in the region as in other countries bank on the knowledge provided by both their respective families as well their schools. At this stage, the schools are called elementary schools which strive to enhance the adjustment of the children, and as well prepare them for secondary schools. Virtues learnt at this level are maintained and carried over to other levels of education. The importance of this school level cannot be over emphasized, hence the name, primary schools. As a result, Guidance and Counselling is of a paramount importance to address the academic, vocational, personal and social needs of the children. Through this, the kids are enabled to develop positive self-image and actualize their adjustment needs that leads them into the future. The abilities, skills and desired personalities are harnessed through effective Guidance and Counselling programmes at the primary school level. This is done to achieve the aims and objectives of primary education as stipulated in the National Policy on Education by the Federal Republic of Nigeria. It is therefore recommended that all hands should be on deck to brighten the future of primary school children though the efficient and effective implementation of Guidance and Counselling at the said level.*

KEYWORDS: Early Interventions Strategies, School Children, Primary School, Guidance and Counselling, Children Growth.

INTRODUCTION

The elementary school level of education is the most important in all education levels. It is for this reason that it is labeled primary school. The primary school, is but part of the early education processes that prepares a child for the secondary school, among other numerous benefits. It is important to note here that both the primary school teachers and parents of the kids join hands to mould the mind of the child to a meaningful status.

The need to institute counselling programmes in primary school cannot be over emphasized. Human mind at this level is usually in a "tabular rasa" form. This implies that the mind of the child, at this level is virgin and open, needing to be filled up. By virtues of good counselling and subsequent training, the kid begins to develop positively. This is what task this paper explores using guidance and counselling as a prolific tool for effective human living and adjustment. Thus, guidance and counseling are remedial, preventive and developmental. It takes care of the needs of the pupils to demonstrate adjustment and maturity in relationships and cushion possible discovery of their talents, talents, abilities, potentialities, strengths and weakness at the earliest stages for their own betterment. The need for people to live functional and meaningful lives makes it imperative that early guidance and counseling programmes

should be established at the primary school level. The aim is to enhance early and positive adjustment procedures for meaningful living. That is the crux of this paper.

Concept of Guidance and Counselling.

Guidance is a programme of service meant to enhance the ability of clients to cope with circumstances and be of need to themselves and the society. Guidance enables clients to make choices which are intended to bring self-direction and adjustment. It is designed to help clients adjust meaningfully to the environment, develop the ability to set realistic goals and improve on total educational programmes.

Thus, Zera and Riccio in Omebe (2005) defined guidance as a process, developmental in nature, by which an individual is assisted to understand, accept and utilize own abilities, aptitudes, interests and attitudinal patterns in relation to the aspirations. Olayinka in Egbo (2009) asserts that guidance programmes should help clients in reaching rather, two opposite goals: adjustment to society, and freedom to act as unique individuals. As well, Isakson and Minsk in Omebe (2005) see guidance as a programme of service to individuals based on the needs of each individual; an understanding of his immediate environment and the influences of the factors on the learner and unique features of the school. This is why guidance assists each pupil to understand himself, accept himself and live effectively in his society in addition to having learning experiences about his world of work (Alao, 1991). Pupils' right from school start preparation for the world of work and should be properly guided in educational, personal –social and vocational spheres of life in order to make right choices.

Guidance comes from the root world, guide which means to direct, protect, steer and lead. It is therefore a process and procedure for achieving a helping relationship. Guidance therefore could simply be defined as a helping process through which troubled individuals are encouraged to receive terms and situations in order to be fully adjusted in the face of related difficulties. That is why Ipaye in Egbo (2009) upholds that guidance in everyday language has always carried the connotation of help given to an individual or group of individuals in areas like personal, social, educational and vocational which are designed to ensure meaningful adjustment in their existence. Good guidance programmes organized for learners at the primary school level are therefore intended to actualize positivity in whole life adjustment meant to cushion the growing child into meaningful living and adaptations.

Counselling, on the other hand is the soul of the guidance programme, and the wheel upon which guidance rotates. It is a process in which a specialist counsellor undertakes to assist another person in a person to person or face to face encounter. The assistance may take many forms which includes educational, vocational, social, recreational, emotional and or moral, and this could be organized in groups or individually. Thus, Roux in Anagbogu (2002) defines counselling as a dynamic and purposeful relationship between two people in which procedures vary with the nature of the students' needs, but in which there is always mutual participation by the counsellor and the client with the focus of self-actualization and self-determination by the client.

Counselling is a relationship characterized by mutual respect, effective communication, genuine and complete acceptances of the client by the counsellor and concentration on the needs, problems and feelings of the clients. It is also relationship that facilitates growth and changes in the client to become more freely and fully functional. It is a major service that is

incorporated in guidance which is but an interactive process between a counsellor and the client, meant to enhance proper self-understanding for the client to have better behavioural changes. Thus, Anagbogu (2002), affirms that individuals strive to achieve optimal development of personal resources and that counselling aid the children in developing the most effective ways of identifying and achieving desired and desirable goals for better adjustment and living. That means that counselling prevents frustrations, anxieties and stress.

Guidance and Counselling therefore recognizes the worth and dignity of the individual and is designed to enhance, the total development of mental, vocational, emotional, intellectual and socio personal aspects of the clients. It is purely an education service which among others:

- Develop, assess and improve educational programmes
- Enhance teaching and improve the competence of teachers
- Make reasoning more meaningful to children
- Reduce educational costs
- Develop and promote an effective use of innovative materials in schools.(Federal Republic of Nigeria,2004)

This is consequent on the fact that Nigerias philosophy of education is based on the assimilation of the individual into a sound and effective citizen and equal educational opportunities for all her citizenry.

Who is a Counsellor?

The counsellor is a professional who through diagnosing, planning, predicting, interpreting and evaluating provides educational, personal, social and vocational assistance to the clients in such a way that it would reflect their interests, objectives, potentialities and needs for effective adjustment (Anagbogu, 2002). To her, the counsellor has the skilled task to aid the personal growth and development of his clients. As a result, she classified the qualities of the professional counsellor to include being understanding, sympathetic, friendly, humorous having stability, patience, sincerity, tactfulness, tolerance, calmness, broadmindedness, kindness, pleasantries, intelligence, resourcefulness and cordiality in all characteristics.

Emenogu in Egbo (2009) writes that the term- counsellor is reserved for those with professional training in counseling; that is an expert in his area of specialization and has cultivated skills in helping people understand their situations, classify their values and make informed decisions. The counsellors' personality therefore is relevant to his effectiveness as the person of the counsellor is a key element in any counseling relationship. Accordingly, the counsellor should be understanding, have a sense of humour, respect other people's opinion, be sympathetic, patient, friendly, objective, sincere, tolerant, neat, clean, broadminded, kind, intelligent, self-confident, cooperative and pleasant.

The counsellor must be able to predict and understand human behaviour. He must be able to understand realities of the time and be able to apply same in helping the clients and mankind. He must have interest of his client in mind and should be able to have completed at least a first degree programme in counselling in any accredited university. Against the above background,

Ifelunmi (1997) sees the counsellor as a trained expert who is exposed to enough psychology, test instruction and administration, practicum as well as theories needed to understand clients' problems and give assistance. His main function is to supervise the psychological development and adjustment of the clients at any level. He is a professional and an accurate record keeper with which he carries out the daily roles and functions of instituting meaningfulness into individual clients without coercion.

Goals of a Guidance and Counselling

The Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004) states 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 schools. Thus, the provision of guidance and counselling services in schools is geared towards helping clients to understand self and to take appropriate, social and psychological lifelong decisions. The Federal Ministry of Education in Egbo (2009), in their blueprint for Guidance and Counselling, made a 12 point objective of Guidance and Counselling at the junior and senior secondary schools.

1. Tutor learners for higher achievements
2. Encourages client to develop adaptive skills to cope with changes in family and home life
3. Help children cope with examination anxieties
4. Equip clients with problem solving and decision making skills
5. Enable children develop positive self image
6. Encourage children to develop good interpersonal relationship
7. Equip students with skills for making appropriate and satisfying choices
8. Assist in smooth transitions from one educational level to another
9. Assist school administration in improving educational opportunities and programmes.
10. Mobilize all the available resources of the school, home and community for the satisfaction of childrens educational vocational and psychological needs.
11. Assist the teachers, other school staff members and parents in understanding the needs and problems of the school children.
12. Assist students develop adequate time management skills.

This is a welcome development more so as Nigeria has been experimenting between the 6-3-3-4 and 9-3-4 systems of education. The implication is that the child spends 6 years at the primary school, 3 years at the Junior Secondary School and 4 years at the university, in the first instance or spends 9 in the primary school, 3 years in the secondary school and 4 years in the university in the second instance. So, the primary school Counsellor has a lot to offer in assisting school children. In specific terms, Animba in Egbo(2009) believes that in a wider perspective, the task of the school counsellor in Nigeria and elsewhere is to give the school children the opportunity to define, explore, discover and adopt ways of living a more satisfying and resourceful life within the social, educational and vocational groupings with which he identifies. The goals of counselling include positive changes in behaviour in psychosocial, academic, vocational, ethical and personal areas. It brings out the best in the client and institutes a way forward in handling related problems of personality adjustment and career development.

Thus, Ipaye (1992) describes guidance and counselling as being:

1. **Developmental** – assisting learners in developing, understanding of processes of achieving one's life goals.
2. **Preventive**- enabling children to identify areas of weakness and negative aspects of self and possible steering around same to positive build up.
3. **Curative** – assisting people with problems to possibly resolve them and
4. **Therapeutic** – reorganizing priorities and effecting behavioural modifications to the advantage of the clients.

Elementary School Counselling

The Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004) views the objectives of primary school education to include:

1. The inculcation of permanent literacy, and the ability to communicate effectively
2. The laying of a sound basis for scientific and reflective thinking
3. Citizenship education as a basis for effective participation as contribution to the life of the society.
4. Development in the child, the ability to adapt to his changing environment
5. Providing the child with opportunities for developing manipulative skills that will enable him function effectively the society within the limits of his capacity and
6. Providing basic tools for further educational advancement including preparation trades and crafts of the society.

Transplanting of trees are usually done only when such tree species are seedlings. Tall palm trees can hardly be transplanted. Primary school kids are tender in age, ranging between six to thirteen years. This makes counselling at this level very paramount and different from counselling at other levels of education. It is at this elementary stage that we can really identify and begin to nurture the potentials of the primary school children to maturity. Based on this, relegating and deferring elementary school counselling are but intentional deferment to the developmental growth of the children which is senseless and cannot be sustained. The best time to frame good behavioural patterns and characteristics in people is at the elementary school stage. At this stage the pupils are still innocent and open to accommodate facts which at maturity (secondary and tertiary), they easily shed off some and retain some.

The primary school children are at the stage of formation of identity and self-concept. They are open to a myriad of options and that is why guidance and counselling services are supposed to be prevalent at this stage because it is better to train kids than to mend men. The Universal Basic Education in Nigeria in 1976 and the subsequent National Policy on Education are but strategies designed to sustain zeal for education, skill and development in Nigerian school children. They are both fashioned out for functional, universal and qualitative education among Nigerian youths. This is why guidance and counselling services should be provided at the elementary school stage to nurture the development and growth of the school kids. Thus, Ipaye (1993) writes prophetically that no matter how good and well-structured the new educational policy in Nigeria may be, if guidance and counselling services are not given priority, and made

an integral part of the system, it cannot succeed. This is all because the school counsellors in primary schools work with teachers, parents, headteachers and the pupils to induce effectiveness, adjustment and wellbeing of the pupils.

Essence of Primary School Guidance and Counseling

Hardly does a primary school child volunteer as a counselling client. This is due to immaturity in thought patterns of the children at that level. This copious fact adds however, to the tasks of the primary school counsellor who is expected to be selective in his counselling strategies. To a large extent for example, the client centred theory at the elementary school level is 'doctored' because the kids can hardly think decisively for themselves. Thus behaviour modification strategies and techniques in operant, classical and modeling theories; observational techniques as well as play therapy techniques are implored in counselling the children. Behaviour among school children that are rewarded easily keep reoccurring, while extinction also, can take place appropriately. The implication is that counsellors should device effective, efficacious and related techniques to eliminates totally or weaken deviant behaviours.

The childs' feelings, emotions and interest should be highly considered and close working relationship with parents would significantly increase the wellbeing of the child. The counsellor should be able to pick nonverbal, and or verbal cues which are significant in any counselling processes to help the elementary school client. Besides, the counsellor would also strive to seek for clients than sit back and wait for clients because of the immaturity of the school children. As well, the counsellor should be good in record keeping.

Krumboltz and Horseford in Egbo (2012) write that counselling techniques at the primary school are really devised to fit individuals as at times, the pupils are helped to make good decisions by learning to:

1. Construct alternative behaviour
2. Seek relevant information about alternatives
3. Weigh values and possible outcomes and
4. Formulates tentative plans of action

The counsellor therefore is expected to emphasis therapeutic principles in teaching and counseling the pupils for efficient learning processes. The primary school children therefore need counselling for the following reasons:

1. Need to tap and harness the individual pupils' ability, interest, personality, talents and aptitude starts at this level for their developmental growth.
2. Need to provide special help for numerous primary school children to avert possible crimes and health hazards
3. Need to stem the tide of maladaptive behaviours in the school system and the general public
4. Need to identify and nurture the gifted and talented children
5. Need for behavioural changes as many homes now breed social problems

6. Need for outreach counselling especially as many homes are impoverished
7. Need to provide the child with a sound foundation for future, academic, psychological and personal growth

The need for counselling at the primary school system, according to Durojaiye in Egbo (2008) emanate from the fact that the Nigerian family had experienced significant changes that had resulted in breakdown of family cohesiveness and increased rate of divorce. This has significantly increased the one parent home trend and subsequent increment in deviant behaviours among children because:

1. Divorce and its accompanying strains continue to increase
2. Children are being reared differently and more frequently by outsiders (maids or day care givers)
3. Mothers are plagued by the guilt of leaving their children to go to work
4. Parents generally do not have time to monitor their primary school children.

Consequently, primary school teachers and counsellors need to understand the unique characteristics and nature of each pupil as well as be able to make relative referrals at any point in time. Good classroom and social and social climate should be created for inclusive development of the pupils for maximum sustenance of solutions to academic, vocational and personal social problems of the Nigerian primary school pupil.

CONCLUSION

School guidance services are but job aspects where counsellors exhibit specialized dispensation of their jobs. Thus, information, orientation, counselling, appraisal, placements, referrals, evaluation, follow up and research are applied also at the primary school level to bring the best in the school kids. Unfortunately, focus and emphases are placed on the secondary and tertiary levels in schools guidance and counselling programmes, instead of the primary stage where the pupils are at the formative stages of their character.

The primary school kids encounter problems from sexual abuse, lateness to school, truancy, cheating at home and in schools, bullying, fighting, withdrawal problems, day dreaming, poor study habits, among others. If counseling is properly applied to stem these problems at the formative stages, the kids will experience less adjustment problems, even in subsequent stages of their lives. This explains the need for school guidance and counseling at the primary school level. As a result, all stake holders in education in Nigeria, should join handsto encourage and invest in crucial counseling programmes at the primary school level to avert maladjustment problems at the secondary and tertiary levels in later stages of life. This is the onus of this paper.

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