

NEEDED EDUCATIONAL AND PROFESSIONAL RE-ORIENTATION OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS FOR MORE EFFECTIVE COUNSELLING SERVICES IN NIGERIA

Dr. (Mrs) A.I. Ojeme

Institute of Education, University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria

ABSTRACT: *The purpose of this paper was to examine the needed educational and professional re-orientation of school principals for more support towards effective counselling services in Nigerian schools. In this endeavour, principal's positive disposition has been conceived as a tool for successful realization of guidance programmes in schools. This paper also noted that in spite of the acknowledged or well known significance of school principals towards effective counselling services in schools, their disposition is however, not quite supportive. The paper therefore, recommends the re-orientation of school principals towards providing more support for counsellors job. Towards this goal, it examined various educational and professional ways and means of re-orientating school principals. The re-orientation of school principals would enable or facilitate more positive principal's support for counsellors in schools. It is hoped that the points made in this paper would bring into sharper focus of educational policy makers and school operators, the desirability of re-orienting school principals for more effective counselling services in school. This could be done through (i) leadership training and re-orientation that emphasizes guidance services (ii) increasing the content of counselling course units in principal's in-service education (iii) counselling association of Nigeria routine interface with school counsellors and principals amongst others.*

KEYWORDS: Educational, Professional, Re-Orientation, School Principal, Counselling

INTRODUCTION

The growth and development of guidance and counseling both as a course of study and as a relevant service sector in Nigerian schools was facilitated by the federal government launching of the national policy on Education in 1977 and the subsequent editions of 1981, 1998 and 2004. This is an acknowledgement of the fact that guidance counsellors have inevitable functions to perform in schools towards the overall achievements of national objectives of secondary education, which emphasizes "preparation for useful living within the society" and "preparation for higher education", are adequately achieved (Oladele, 2000)

Among scholars, (Oladele, 2000; Odebunmi, 2000; Ataha, 2006; Egbochuku, 2010; Oramah, 2012) in the field of guidance and counseling in Nigeria and indeed globally, it is believed that principals and counsellors, have the shared responsibility in their respective ways of contributing towards children's successful education in schools. It has been established through research (Ojeme, 2011; Perusse, Goodnough, Donegan and Jones, 2004; Kaplan, 1995), that the quality of counselling programme, is higher in school situations in which principals have more positive disposition towards the school guidance counsellor. It means that counselling services are more effectively delivered when there is a positive relationship between principal's and counsellors. It has also been observed however, that in most school situations in Nigeria, school principals are inclined to diverting guidance counsellors to the performance of non-counselling

functions (Ojeme 2011). Also, Nwamuo and Ugwuwbguem (2015), from their study on school heads' administrative intervention as a hindrance to the effective implementation of guidance programme, reported that principals preferred school counsellor to carry out non-counselling duties such as teaching, collection of fees, registration of students, and computation of continuous assessment. Earlier, in the same vein, Oladele (2000), Iwuama (2010) and Unachukwu and Igborgbor (2014), in relation to this issue, noted that some school principals are in the habit of (i) assigning non-counselling services to counsellors (ii) not providing enabling environment for school counsellors to effectively discharge their duties (iii) using non-qualified counsellors to provide guidance services.

The foregoing observations provide a fair view of principals' disposition towards counselling services in Nigeria. This disposition is suggestive of the need for change of attitude towards eliciting more positive principal support for counsellors in schools. In view of the focus of this paper, the writer has taken the liberty, based on her knowledge of the field of counselling and professional orientation to briefly discuss the following as vital sources of insight towards school principals' re-orientation for effective counselling services.

1. Leadership training and re-orientation that emphasizes guidance services.
2. Counsellor demonstration of competence and relevance in schools
3. Information communication technology orientation
4. Increasing the content of counselling course units in principals in-service education
5. Counselling Association of Nigeria; routine interface with school counsellors and principals
6. Winning the school principal's friendship

Leadership training and re-orientation that emphasizes guidance services

In the Nigerian school system, the guidance programmes are under the supervision of the school principal, who is the administrative head and leader. The school principal is the accounting officer on whose behalf the counsellor carries out his/her functions. It is conceivable in this dispensation, therefore, that a positive disposition of the school principal towards the counselling programmes can determine its possibilities and limitations.

To a very large extent, the leadership role of the school principal in the Nigerian school system is all about preparation for the normative public examinations. Accordingly, while a school principal could be doing everything to ensure that subject teachers and laboratories are in place, it sometimes requires an extra push to empower the school guidance counsellor to play its part towards the overall education of pupils and students. Paradoxically, however, the effective conduct of school counselling services is inevitably crucial to the child's education. In this context, therefore, it is considered very crucial for the school principal's leadership qualities to be primed towards more recognition for guidance programmes as Nigerian schools aim at preparing the child for a competitive future.

Counsellors and principals can act as powerful allies in school reform, focusing on helping students access to school resources and be more successful in their school endeavours. To work effectively with each other, they must understand and appreciate the expertise and complementary role they must play and how they should support each other. Oladele (2000),

noted that programme development and change are fairly likely to succeed if stimulated from the top rather than from the bottom-up. It means therefore, that principal's support and participation are crucial to the school guidance programme. Adeyemo, Daodu and Elegbede (2012) claimed that a collaborative approach by school counsellor and school administrator, could promote the learning experience of students. According to them, principals, who do not understand the objectives of the counselling programme, tend not to provide the needed leadership or support.

The principal, as the administrative head of a school should play the following role:

- i. Demonstrate active personal commitment for the school guidance programmes by making explicit statements about its value
- ii. Take a leading role in creating the collaborative environment necessary for cooperative and integrated guidance programmes
- iii. Provide administrative support for the guidance programmes
- iv. Ensure the provision of adequate programmes and budgeting for materials
- v. Use his/her leadership position to involve parents and teachers in guidance programmes through mobilization
- vi. Make time for meetings regularly with the counsellor
- vii. Ensure that the counsellor serves on major school committees
- viii. Encourage teachers to work freely with the counsellor.

In the same vein, Dollorhide (2003), Meyers (2005) and Murray (1995) remarked that literature describing leadership strategies for school counsellors, calls for the involvement of principals in their work. Some authorities, Unachukwu and Igborgbor (1991) have also remarked that the extent to which the principal shows committed interest in the guidance programmes would directly influence the dignity, the substance, strength and success of the programmes. They further observed that failure of a school counsellor in his or her guidance endeavours, begins when the school principal is ill-disposed towards the school's guidance programme.

From the foregoing therefore, there seems to be justifiable need for school principal's collaboration with the school counsellors as such collaboration would positively impact on students' development. The desirability of this synergy and the observed lethargy of school heads towards actualizing warrants the latter's re-orientation.

Counsellor's demonstration of competences and relevance in schools:

The improvement of school counselling services will fundamentally require the counsellor to prove his/her mettle. He/she must show through his/her professional competences and quality services, that the guidance programme is not a mere footnote to the school curriculum. Adeyemo, Daodu and Elegbede (2012) assert that professional counsellors need to exhibit high level of friendly attitudes, desirable personality traits and willingness to discharge their duty whole heartedly, if they are to be efficient and effective in their school counselling programme. They must be efficient and effective in remediation of educational deficiencies, giving occupational information and assisting students in vocational development, carrying out

referrals, changing students' maladaptive behaviours, assisting students make adequate vocational decisions, preventing psychological problems in students (Ataha, 2006). The school guidance counsellor needs to establish administrative links with the school principal in order to be effective in assisting the students solve their problems. Also, Kolo, Bawa and Adisa (2012) opined that counsellors must demonstrate practical skills in the world of counselling if they are to be endeared to their clients and in the school setting. In their study on need for skills improvement among Nigerian counsellors, they found out that both male and female counsellors have need for skills improvement in the areas of feelings and relationship.

The major responsibility of the principal in the area of guidance is to ensure that the possibilities of guidance programmes are realized at all times. However, if the counsellors are a misfit or are indifferent to their responsibilities, the whole programme is likely to be ineffective and wasted. Unachukwu and Igborghor (1991) have stated that the problems militating against guidance programmes in the schools could be laxity, indolence and lack of competence on the part of such guidance counsellors, who are preoccupied with self-accomplishing tasks or programmes, pursuing their personal gains and thereby neglecting their core guidance services. Also National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP, 1996), pointed out that leadership for the school counsellor has not been duly explored and emphasized in either practice or in school counselling preparation programs.

In order to improve counsellor's service capacity, Fitch, T, Newby. E, Ballestero, V, and Marshall J.L (2001) have suggested the need for training school counsellors to collaborate with principals, to be assertive and to elicit administrative support for quality school counselling programmes. Furthermore, they recommended that school counsellors should develop leadership skills and personal partnership with their principals by developing empathy, building respect, and sharing information. Many professionals in the field of guidance and counselling have suggested that school counsellors who are an integral part of principals educational team, should play a vital role in supporting academic achievement by acting as proactive leaders and advocates of students' success. Partnering with the principal to provide leadership in working towards common goals, the counsellor and principal can reinforce each other's action. Thus, increasing the leadership potential of the school (Capuzzi, 1998, House and Martins, 1998, Lee and Walz, 1998, and Guerra, 1998). In addition, Nwamuo and Ugwuegbulam (2015) suggested that counsellors should carry out comprehensive guidance and counselling programme by spending full time working with all students in close collaboration with school administrators, teachers, parents and other stakeholders in the community.

From the foregoing, it could be seen that school counsellors have unique opportunities to assert leadership through increased collaboration and consultation interventions with those significant people in the lives of students. They are expected to acquire the knowledge and skills required to meet the rigorous demands of their profession. They need to be role models and change agents which are more easily accomplished when they are seen in a leadership role in the schools.

Information Communication Technology Orientation

Information communication technology is vital for organizational effectiveness. Hence, all successful organizations take advantage of it. Schools are managed by principals trained in educational administration. These principals are ultimately responsible for everything that goes on in school buildings. The major responsibilities of school principals in the area of guidance programmes are to ensure that the great possibilities of guidance programmes as

already indicated are realized at all times. Principals' support and participation in guidance programme, are crucial to the school guidance programmes.

Information communication technology can enable accurate and reliable career information from websites. This can also be useful to students in making appropriate career choice. The use of the internet models for counselling services is vital in facilitating the counsellor's work. The school principal and counsellor should be adept at using the internet to find out how guidance programmes are discharged in other schools in the world. Principals should be trained to identify counselling models in the internet. Training principals in this area could help to promote their support for guidance programmes. Internet research is also a very vital means of information for counselling. No guidance programme is complete without the information service. Counsellors should locate and dispense information to help students make choices about educational opportunities, personal and career issues. Informational service facilitates the counsellor's job of helping students to understand themselves and the world around them.

Increasing the content of counselling course units in principals in-service Education

School Principals and counsellors have a common goal i.e achieving the successful education of children. As already stated in this paper, the Principals' commitment to guidance programmes, would enable the realization of this goal. It is not surprising that the professional literature on leadership strategies for school counsellors calls for the engagement and involvement of principals (Dollorhide, 2003, Meyers, 2005, Murray 1995).

There is need therefore, for educational policy makers to routinely organize in-service training or seminars/workshops for school principals to improve their knowledge of guidance and counselling. By planning and organizing various in-service training for school principals, it will not only strengthen principals' relationship with school counsellors but also establish ties that will enhance their role in problem – solving and mediating situations. Topics for principals' in-service training as suggested by Schmidt (2003), could include the following amongst others:

- (1) Conflict resolution
- (2) Effective communication skills and information communication technology
- (3) Classroom management
- (4) Learning disabilities
- (5) Using the media centre
- (6) Handling crises
- (7) Computers in the classroom
- (8) Suicide prevention
- (9) Peer helper programmes
- (10) Support for school counsellor's work
- (11) Positive relationship with school counsellor
- (12) Record keeping and retrieval systems

Knowledge, skills and dispositions acquired through the in-service training in the above areas could be quite useful to the guidance programme.

Counselling Association of Nigeria; Routine interface with School counsellors and Principals

Guidance in Nigerian has developed to a stage where there is a national Association known as Counselling Association of Nigeria (CASSON), which is charged with the responsibility of seeing to the professional growth and development of its subject and members. Also, the Certification and License Board (CALB), in collaboration with CASSON, is responsible for enacting the policies which guide professional services and practice. Every Association has its constitution, to guide the activities of the Association, Unachukwu and Igborgbor (2014) and Egbochuku (2010) highlighted some of the important objectives of the Association as follows:

- (1) To promote sound guidance and counselling services in the interest of society and individual
- (2) To advance high standards of professional conduct amongst members of the Association
- (3) To conduct scientific educational and professional meetings, workshops and conferences
- (4) To examine conditions which create barriers to individual development and to work to remove them.

CASSON, therefore, must as a basis for promoting counselling effectiveness in schools, interface regularly with their members as well as school authorities. In the same vein, school Counsellors must practice according to established ethical standards and regulations by the professional Association. The onus is on CASSON and CALB, to have a routine interface with their members, to ensure that these ethical guidelines are followed by school counsellors. Ethical standards serve as a broad framework within which counsellors interpret situation, understand legal and professional implications and make reasonably sound judgements in assisting clients (Schmidt, 2003).

CASSON, should effectively communicate the ethical guidelines of the Association to school principals. In order to prevent them from using their administrative power in assigning non – counselling duties to school counsellors as their duties.

Winning the school principals' friendship

A positive relationship between school principals and school counsellors has been established through research (Whiston, 2007) to be a major ingredient for boosting the performance of counsellors in schools. Also Unachukwu and Igborgbor (2014) have argued that the success of counselling services in the schools would depend predominantly on the quality of the relationship between the school counsellor and the school principal. Ojeme (2011) has shown that principals value counsellors who demonstrate competence, trust worthiness, collaborative respect, as well as those who go the extra mile to provide a connection between home and school in handling issues bothering on student's development. Generally, school principals are known to appreciate school counsellors who support school mission and assist in achieving the

successful education of children. It is implied that school counsellors who are good at their job would have a good chance to win principals' love and support. This should be the first line of work by school counsellors to succeed in the school. The admonition or slogan therefore, should be "do your work well and win your principal's love and support".

Also, Ojeme (2011) has shown that counsellors' establishment of smooth communication link with school principals, puts the counsellors on the winning paths in terms of pushing through their request, sharing what needs to be shared and meeting the needs of students. Furthermore, critical incidents that ensure support from the principal include situations where he/she sees the value that school counsellors add to the school in terms of impact on students, parents, administration and the entire school (Kaplan, 1995). Consequently, it is instructive for counsellors to note the work attributes that principals value (such as competence, support for school mission, advocacy for students, display of knowledge of counselling skills, commitment, sincerity, communication and collaboration with principals) and use same as their own benchmarks for enhancement of their professional roles. This would ensure that they continue to enjoy acceptance and embrace by school principals, which in turn win their support for counselling services.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

In this paper some modest effort has been made to bring into focus the need for positive disposition of school principals towards counselling services in schools if guidance programmes objectives are to be realized fully. In the foregoing pages of this paper, the writer has no doubt demonstrated that principals have great role in fostering effective counselling services in Nigerian schools. It is however, dis-heartening to observe that in spite of this potential role of school principal in promoting effective counselling services, their current disposition as noted in this paper leaves much to be desired. It is considered that the re-orientation of school principals as put forward in this work could bring about the desired positive change.

Furthermore, this paper has attempted to forcefully draw the attention of Educational policy – makers and stakeholders to the potency of school principals' role in fostering effective counselling services in schools as well as the needed orientation. It has also recommended educational and professional ways and means of re-orientating school principals' disposition towards providing more support for effective counselling services.

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