

REVITALIZING COUNSELLOR EDUCATION FOR PEACE AND NATIONAL INTEGRATION IN NIGERIA: REHABILITATING A NATION IN TRAUMA.

Catherine O. Ogwuche (Ph.D)

Department of Guidance and Counselling,
University of Abuja, Abuja, Nigeria.

Victoria O. Adikwu (Ph.D)

Department of Guidance and Counselling,
University of Abuja, Abuja, Nigeria.

Isaiah I. Shamo (Ph.D)

Department of Guidance and Counselling
University of Abuja, Abuja, Nigeria.

ABSTRACT: *In Nigeria, there are issues of terrorism, youth restiveness, hate speech, disintegration, lawlessness occasioned by kidnapping, ritual killings, banditry, armed robbery, as well as heightened corruption among other vices. Issues of this nature need the role of counsellors when stakeholders are formulating critical policies for national integration. Nigeria is currently in trauma having been besieged on all fronts by all manner of impunity in all facets of our national life. Hence, it is on this premise that this paper examined how counsellor education can be rebranded and revitalized to mitigate the scourge of all these threats to our nationhood. In this paper, the authors underscored the need to revitalize counsellor education to produce counsellors that can effectively use appropriate counselling skills and approaches to foster peace and national integration in Nigeria. virtues such as religious tolerance, patriotism, dignity of labour, peaceful co-existence, unity in diversity, honesty among others have been conceptualized as veritable instruments for peace and national integration through counsellor education in theory and practice. Consequent upon this, the authors recommended that well trained counsellors should enlighten students on the need for unity and integration among Nigerians. Seminars and workshops should equally be organized by counsellors in collaboration with the government, non-governmental organizations and other stakeholders in order to discuss and tackle contemporary issues for peace and national integration and stability.*

KEYWORDS: revitalization, counsellor-education, peace, national integration, rehabilitation.

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria's gradual march to nationhood eventually culminated into the historic amalgamation of the Northern and southern protectorates in 1914 by the colonial Governor-General, Sir Lord Lugard. This started with the systematic conquest and subjugation of various sovereign ethno religious kingdoms and empires by the British colonial government. These sovereign kingdoms and empires administered their political entities independently of each other.

Paradoxically, the geo-political entity called Nigeria resulted (somehow coincidentally) into a nation, but the component ethnic nationalities remain ever conscious and assertive of their political and ethno religious autonomy. Consequently, the problem of unity in diversity over the years appeared insurmountable even after sixty (60) years of independence from colonial imperialism. Most often, the nation found herself engulfed in endless vicious cycle of agitation for economic, political and ethno religious autonomy usually characterized by massive destruction of lives and property.

The British colonial policies which were characterized by divide and rule strategy promoted and intensified ethnic and religious rivalry among the diverse groups and communities in Nigeria. Nigeria, the most populous country in black Africa has over 400 indigenous languages and dialects (Awonusi, 1993). The incessant cases of religious extremism and intolerance, political crisis, ethnic uprisings by militia groups, kidnapping, armed robbery, ritual killings, armed robbery, heightened corruption, among several other vices have assumed unprecedented dimensions in Nigeria. The nation, currently in a traumatic situation is in dire need of rehabilitation. Counselling therapy appear to be the most potent tool to redress these anomalies, hence the need to revitalize counsellor education which shall equip counsellors with requisite skills and competences to salvage the nation out of her numerous predicaments.

Conceptual Framework

The paper discussed key concepts central to the issue under consideration. These are counsellor education, peace and national integration.

Counsellor Education

The philosophy underlying the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013) in Nigeria hinges on five national objectives as follows:

1. A free and democratic society;
2. A great and dynamic economy;
3. A just and egalitarian society;
4. A united strong and self reliant nation; and
5. A land full of bright opportunities for all citizens.

The overall philosophy of the nation as enunciated in the National Policy on Education is based on the following set of beliefs:

- a. Education is an instrument for national development and social change;
- b. Education is vital for the promotion of a progressive and united Nigeria;
- c. Education maximizes the creative potentials and skills of the individual for self-fulfillment and general development of the society;
- d. Education is compulsory and a right of every Nigerian irrespective of gender, social status, religion, ethnic background, and any other peculiar individual challenges; and
- e. Education is to be qualitative, comprehensive, functional and relevant to the needs of the society.

The philosophy of Nigerian education is based on the development of the individual into a sound and effective citizen and the provision of equal opportunities for all citizens of the nation at the basic, secondary and tertiary levels both within and outside the formal school system. Counsellor education is therefore a training process which enables a practicing counsellor to acquire specialized knowledge, skills and competences which qualifies him/her to practice as a professional counsellor. The process involves training and retraining, designed to keep both prospective and practicing counsellors abreast with current trends in counselling practice. Therefore, in recognition of the pivotal role of counselling in national integration, the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013:40) stated that "government shall continue to make provision for the training of teachers in Guidance and counselling, establish and equip counselling clinics, career resource centres and information centres. Proprietors of schools shall provide adequate number of guidance counsellors for their institutions".

The growth of counselling in schools was further motivated by the Federal Government in its five-year national development plan (1975-1980) which highlighted the need for career guidance thus: *The absence of counselling in our education and training system in the past must be held responsible for the frustrations observed among many of the nation's young men and women. To remedy the situation, career counselling will be institutionalized in all the nation's educational and training systems. In view of the apparent ignorance of many young people about career prospects and in view of personality maladjustment among school children, career officers and counsellors will be appointed in post primary institutions.*

Thus, the importance of counsellor education for peace and national integration in Nigeria cannot be over emphasized.

Peace

The United Nations General Assembly defined peace as dignity, wellbeing for all, not just absence of war. Wikipedia defined peace as a concept of societal friendship and harmony in the absence of hostility and violence. In a social sense, peace is commonly used to mean a lack of conflict such as war and freedom from fear of violence between individuals or groups. (en.m.wikipedia.org).

Merriam Webster defined peace as a state of tranquility or quietness such as freedom from civil disturbance, a state of security or order within a country provided for by law or custom; freedom from disquieting or oppressive thought or emotions and harmony in personal relations. (www.merriam-webster.com).

Sustainable peace is seen as a lasting state of mind or condition where there is total calmness within an environment. An emotional, social, political and mental stability, but not necessarily absolute peace. It does not mean that there will be absence of little misdemeanor here and there. It is a state of social stability and tranquility that allows people to go about their legitimate business without fear or any threat or molestation. Peace in a functionalist view is seen as playing a social function and being the product of the function of social structures and institutions. Consequently, peace is said to have the social functions of integration and order. As such, for society and the state to function properly, they need peace otherwise, there would be a lot of stress on the social and political systems and consequently breakdown (Agi, 2017).

In actual fact, peace is a relative term which varies from one geopolitical setting to another. However, relative peace should guarantee the fundamental human rights of citizens in a state as well as the smooth conduct of government activities without undue interference from internal or external aggression, hence meaningful growth and development cannot thrive in a state of anarchy.

National Integration

Onifade (2013) defined national integration as the process of unifying a society which tends to make it harmonious in all things. According to the Author, a country is well integrated when there is no violence and the allocation of resources is fairly distributed. Since the return of democracy in 1999, the craze to amass wealth by politicians has been the major cause of violence and national disintegration in Nigeria. Adeleye (2014) reported that the civil war of 1967 – 1970 was believed to have been fought to keep Nigeria as one country, but the current breakdown of social order constitutes unimaginable threats to national integration.

Causes of conflict in Nigeria

After sixty years of independence as a sovereign state, Nigeria is solely responsible for her domestic affairs. We cannot continue living in the past, blaming our predicament on British imperialist policies of divide and rule. There are numerous and various causes of crisis and conflicts in Nigeria. However, at the root of every conflict is the power tussle for relevance and superiority between opposing social classes. The dominating class employ every imaginable means to retain and maintain their status quo to the disadvantage of the marginalized who also resists the domineering tendencies of the privileged class. They revolt against marginalization, neglect and deprivation, thus pitching themselves against each other on a perennial collision course.

The underlying cause of conflict in any situation is **the challenge of identity**. Identity is the distinctiveness and uniqueness of any group or individual.

Osaghea and Suberu (2005) broadly defined identity as any group attributes that provides recognition or definition, reference, affinity, coherence and meaning for individual members of the group acting individually or collectively. Generally, the basic identities are ethnicity, religion, regionalism, class, gender, politics and age. These different identities contribute to conflict in Nigeria. Aleyomi, (2012) established that ethno-religious crisis does not only undermine the effectiveness of federalism to foster national unity and security but also threatens the stability of the federation and sustainable development. This is connected with inherent contradictions in the dispositions and efforts of ethnic and religious leaders in the country.

Furthermore, Abdullai and Saka (2007) added that another cause of ethno-religious crisis in Nigeria is colonialism that was boosted by **military dictatorship** and strengthened by the contradiction embedded in the Nigerian federalism. This has led to not less than one hundred politically ethnically and religiously motivated conflicts in Nigeria. This opinion was also supported by Alubo (2004) and Haliru (2012). Moreover, Ojie and Ewhruajakpor (2009) confirmed that ethnic diversity has hindered the sustainable development of the culture of peace

and national integration in Nigeria. Adesoji and Alao (2009) emphasized that the indigene-settlers syndrome is one of the causes of crisis in Nigeria like in many other societies in the world. Also, the **politicization of identities** is another cause. Take religion for instance, ideally under the Nigerian constitution government should be neutral in religious matters according to section 10 of the constitution which affirms the essential secularity of the Nigerian federation. What takes place rather is the mixing of religion with politics. As Ojo (2004) confirmed that Christian Pentecostal leaders collectively adopted Olusegun Obasanjo as a symbol of Christian control of the political sphere believing that he was an answer to prayers about the ending of oppression and mis-governance and the ending of muslim political dominance. According to Ojo (2004), the perception of the overbearing influences of Christianity on Obasanjo's presidency, elicited fears of domination from muslim leaders in the north. The nepotistic nature of politics in Nigeria made such fear reasonable. A similar scenario is said to be playing out in Buhari's presidency at present.

This is only a tip of the iceberg where politics are meddled with religion for political advantage, thus undermining peaceful coexistence in Nigeria as a secular state. In most states of the federation, state governors build mosques and churches in government house, sponsor pilgrimages to mecca and Israel, publish religious sermons in the newspapers that are offensive to the other faith, and make comments that are inflammatory (Bianchi, 2004).

Unemployment is another cause of crises in Nigeria. according to Longman Dictionary of contemporary English (2003), unemployment is a situation when a large proportion of people have no job for a living. In such a case, many problems and vices will prevail in the society. These include poverty, hunger, stealing, armed robbery, vandalism, kidnapping, political thuggery, prostitution and other criminal offences which leads to violence. In the same vein NEEDS (2005) states that if rural areas are not transformed to stem the growth in migration to urban areas, the state of urban unemployment could become unmanageable, which will threaten the maintenance of law and order. Poverty which is a consequence of unemployment especially among the youths in Nigeria has assumed a crises dimension and this is what is reflected in much of the violence in this country (Human Rights watch, 2006). For instance, the emergence of terrorism and banditry in Northern Nigeria could partly be blamed on economic deprivation over the years. A similar scenario is also holding sway in the Southern part of the country in the form of militancy and secessionist movements. Take for instance, the indigenous people of Biafra (IPOB) in the South East, the Oduduwa People's Congress (OPC) in the South West, The Niger Delta Avengers (NDA) in the Niger Delta, the Almajiris in the North. These are unemployed groups. Some of them are educated and reasonable people. They need to be repositioned and rehabilitated, but nobody cares about them. As unemployment situation is worsening, so also people who have nothing to do for a living keep on committing various atrocities, thus threatening national peace and security.

Nigerian crisis and conflicts are also affected by **international environment**. For instance, one of the effects of the war on terror in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attack in the United States has revealed a polarization between Christianity and Islam, at least a deepening of mutual suspicion and mistrust. The global perception that the United State is anti-Islam and hostile to Muslim nations is echoed in Africa. For example, in the recently published Pew Global Attitudes

Survey, only 32% of Nigerian Muslims (down from 38% in 2003) have a favourable view of the U.S. compared with 89% of Christians (Ruby & Shay 2007). The post 9/11 U.S. war on terrorism and corresponding heightening tension between Israel and the Palestinians are therefore perceived as part of Western agenda of de-islamising the world.

Bad governance is another cause of conflict and violence in Nigeria. Bad governance in this context implies inappropriate development framework, poor and frequent change of policies and programmes, lack of clear vision and commitment to development programmes. These are the causes of failure which result from bad governance. Tribalism, nepotism, favouritism and marginalization are also signs of bad governance. A situation where some segments of the country are well treated in the scheme of things while some are neglected and marginalized could lead to disorder and conflict. When the plight of the marginalized is continually ignored, it could degenerate into violent conflict as highlighted earlier. (Sunday Mirror, June 29, 2008, P3). When the yearnings and aspirations of these neglected groups are not addressed once and for all by the leadership, they constitute serious threats to national integration (The News, November, 2004 P17).

Corruption is another cause of conflict in Nigeria. it is a cankerworm which has eaten deep into the fabric of the Nigerian society. Corruption is found at all levels of government and in every facet of the Nigerian society. The notable forms of corrupt practices in Nigeria include unconventional and fraudulent trade practices such as smuggling of small arms and contraband goods, human trafficking, dealing in counterfeit drugs and food items, etc misappropriation or diversion of funds, kickbacks, bribery, under or over invoicing, false declaration of assets and abuse of office, advance fee fraud (419), cyber crimes and money laundering among others (National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS, 2005). Nigeria is a society where corruption is not only encouraged but celebrated.

Even when anti-graft agencies like Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC), the police, and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) are established to fight corruption, the evil still thrives and flourishes because of weak, ineffectivelaws, cumbersome trials and corrupt judiciary. Corruption can lead to conflict and crisis in a situation where some people are fighting against it while others are supporting it. This means that some people see corruption as evil while some see it as a blessing. When there are discordant tunes in the approach to fight corruption, the evil persists and become very difficult to tame it. The situation in Nigeria has become very desperate when anti-graft agencies themselves are not free from this social malady.

Irregularities in Election: This is a situation whereby election is characterized by malpractices such as poor voting system, multiple voting, snatching of ballot boxes, rigging, intimidation using thugs, falsification of results and vote buying. These can lead to acts of violent conflicts that may assume monumental proportions in terms of heavy loss of lives and property. In a situation where politicians intimidate electorates to vote for particular candidates using thugs, inter and intra party violence can ensue.

Finally, the role of the media is also important in our understanding of the disunity in Nigeria. A good example is the events surrounding the Miss World Contest in November 2002. The conflict was triggered by a comment by a fashion columnist for the southern Newspaper (Dada, 2015). Other causes of conflicts in Nigeria according to Fyenis (2010) are inadequate social amenities and infrastructure and self succession syndrome. Agi (2017) also implicated inordinate ambition of politicians, political fanaticism, unguarded utterances (hate speech), materialism, oil exploration and exploitation as other causes of conflict and disunity in Nigeria.

The Role of Counsellor Education in fostering peace and National integration.

A popular saying – united we stand, divided we fall supports the assertion that unity is strength and division is disintegrative. Omoegun (2012) defined counselling as a helping profession, a relationship of trust between the counsellor and the client. It is an applied psychology, a psychological process of helping people or clients to cope with various life situations.

Furthermore, American Counselling Association (1997) as cited by Olusakin (2011) also define counselling as the application of mental health, psychological or human development principles through cognitive, affective, behavioural or systematic intervention strategies, that address wellness, personal growth or career development as well as pathology. It can therefore be concluded that counselling is a profession of different strategies that ensure peoples' wellness and holistic development to make them cope with various situations like crisis and conflicts in order to achieve peace, harmony and unity in the human society. Olusakin and Nwolisa (2012) concluded in their study on counselling strategies for addressing militancy and social restiveness in Nigeria that there should be counselling sessions with the youths. These sessions should not only focus on solutions but also address understanding the problem and being empowered to make future decisions. They moreover stated that the task of nation building must begin with an elaborate programme and a honest commitment to social reconstruction and moral revolution as their first step towards peaceful co-existence.

Furthermore, Modebelu and Okafor (2012) in a study stated that counselling would help the youths in cultivating cooperation, loyalty and respect to constituted authority, help in handling issues that concern the nation without prejudice and to make them law abiding citizens of Nigeria. They recommended a regular counselling programme for the youths in order to learn followership qualities.

Denga (2012) suggested an urgent national dialogue agenda for Nigeria at all levels of government – community, local, state and federal; however the agenda should be counselling oriented and national security focused. Also, Dada et al (2013) suggested the following in their work on religious bigotry that special seminars and workshops on religious tolerance through group counselling sessions should be organized for religious leaders of both Christians and muslims, parents, teachers and students in Nigerian schools annually. Government should be sensitive and not being religiously biased in its policies and that religious counselling clinics should be established in each religious house and supervised by a Professional counsellor.

Counsellor education according to Okpede (1997) should therefore be revitalized and repositioned to equip prospective and practicing counselors to:

1. devise effective therapy for the treatment of psychological problems such as low self concept, aggression and religious intolerance;
2. get involved in the dispensation of a variety of counselling services in schools, internally displaced persons' camps (IDP) and religious centres; intensive use of rational emotive therapy for persons who have lost logical thinking capacities and vocational counselling for unemployed youths;
3. Counselling with renewed vigour in correctional institutions, reformation, rehabilitation and integration must be the focus here especially with detained terrorists. Vocational counselling and information with religious counselling are of crucial values here;
4. Render adjustment and information counselling in rehabilitation centres for traumatized victims;
5. Counselling for unity in diversity must form the central focus of counselling effort. Counselling against discriminatory treatments (in employment, admission, social welfare, etc) prejudice and intolerance must be intensified;
6. Security consciousness education and counselling must begin at once in primary and secondary schools;
7. The nomads require greater counselling to stem the tide of unabated killings associated with herdsmen to enable them appreciate the value of peaceful co-existence and tolerance; and
8. Value reorientation is also imperative in counsellor education and this could be best achieved under the auspices of a ministry of national guidance.

Counsellor qualities in promoting peace and national integration

The role of counselling in bringing lasting peace is by identifying the source of the problem, possibly the people involved. A counselling approach such as humanistic therapy can be applied. This is a non directive approach because of the assumption that man's inferiority complex, depression, anxiety, frustration and other crises in life push an individual to perpetrate undesirable acts (Iwundu, 2015). All these are caused by wrong self-concept (perception). To reinstate clients like cultists, terrorists or rampaging herdsmen terrorizing different communities, the following methods could serve according to Agi (2017):

1. The counsellor should have unconditional positive regard: The attitude of the counsellor is that of warmth, total acceptance of the client irrespective of his age, gender, socio-economic background, etc. The counsellor should respect the worth and dignity of such client without being judgmental, biased or discriminatory.
2. Counsellor should have a third ear. By this we mean he should be empathic, entering into the frame of reference of the client to appreciate the world from the view point of the client.
3. Genuineness: The counsellor must always be sincere and transparent with his client, client will develop confidence in himself and the counsellor as the counsellor is truthful.
4. Concreteness: If the counsellor must earn the respect he deserves, he must be firm in what he says and does, as every client is very sensitive. He should not be a preacher who says one thing and does another.

5. Congruence: Counselling is not trivialities. The counsellor must be consistent by ensuring he does not allow the client to digress from the context of the discussion. In other words, client should not try to lead the counselling session as that may bring distractions.

SUMMARY CONCLUSION

The paper highlighted the problems associated with Nigeria's diversity to include ethno-religious crisis, terrorism, militancy and other forms of impunity. The underlying causes of these conflicts and crisis that threatens peace and national integration in the nation were also discussed. The role of counselling as well as counsellor education to actualizethese goals have been exhaustively discussed. Counsellor qualities that can enhance effective counselling services have also been identified.

Counsellors must rise up to the challenge of nation building to build peace and national integration in a divided state traumatized by violent conflicts and crises. Counsellor educators must design a training programme to equip counsellors with professional knowledge and skills needed to deliver on their mandate.

Recommendations

There should be an effective and functional counselling clinic in all primary, post primary and tertiary institutions for students and in each local government to non students, at the state house and federal secretariats for civil servants and public office holders.

There should be National Security counselling agenda that should be powered by the Federal, state and local governments with the Counselling Association of Nigeria (CASSON) to ensure and sustain national unity and integration.

The counselling profession should be recognized and supported by law to forestall the challenge of intruders and non professionals from bastardizing the profession. The counselling Association of Nigeria should be up and doing and rollout counselling remedies for all national problems both in print and electronic media.

There should be emphasis on career counselling in order to ameliorate unemployment and promote employability of the Nigeria youths in order for them to be fully engaged. This lend credence to the slogan an idle mindis the devil's workshop. This supports Abdullai and Saka (2007) assertion that "good governance, accountability, poverty and unemployment reduction and true federalism areimportant areas to be addressed in order to solve permanently the problem of ethno religious and political conflicts that, have continued to threaten Nigeria nationhood.

Finally, as Dada (2015) rightly submitted, there should be counselling for peaceful coexistence between the ethnic groups, most especially counselling to stop selfishness, ethno-religious violence and abuse of power for myopic interests.

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