

SPECIAL EDITION
AFRICAN JOURNAL OF STUDIES IN EDUCATION

Volume 9
No.1 April, 2013
ISS
N: 0189-241 X

**An Official Publication of
Faculty of Education
University of Benin
Benin City, Nigeria**

This Special Edition is a product of the collaboration between **Faculty of Education, University of Benin and School of Education, College of Education, Agbor**. It is expected that this partnership relationship will enhance understanding, direction, quality and relevance of intra-education sector research in the context of education personnel development and professionalization.

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT SKILLS AND VOCATIONAL COUNSELLING: PANACEA TO VIOLENCE AND UNEMPLOYMENT IN NIGERIA.

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Abstract

Nigeria is presently bedeviled by high rate of violence, kidnapping, murders, terrorism and unemployment. Many of these evils are perpetrated mostly by young people who blame their criminal behavior on unemployment. This paper therefore, looks at the role of counselling in stemming the tide of violence through the teaching of conflict and anger management in schools. It also explores the practical ways counselling can aid Vocational/Career/Entrepreneurial decision particularly with the introduction of entrepreneurship into the Senior Secondary School curricula. It is believed that when young people can manage conflicts and are gainfully employed (not necessary white collar jobs) the rate of violence will reduce drastically and peace will be entrenched in the society. It was recommended therefore, that counsellors should be retrained on current market trends/ job opportunities, conflict management skills, etc. They should also be allowed and equipped adequately to practice counselling as it is done in developed countries.

Introduction

Violence, a regular and common experience in the past few years has made Nigeria an unsafe and insecure place. It comes in different forms and intensity: religious crisis, ethnic/community clashes, kidnapping, murders terrorism, bombings by 'Boko Haram' etc. These violent activities leave countless victims dead, maimed and properties worth millions of Naira destroyed. The issue of security has become an urgent need in Nigeria because lives and properties are no longer safe and secure. Criminal reports have indicated that most of these atrocities are perpetrated by young people aged 15-40 years. The young adult blame their criminal behaviour on unemployment and poverty. It therefore becomes imperative that any panacea to violence must also address the problem of unemployment in Nigeria. For sustainable peace and security, the problem of unemployed must be given serious priority because like the popular adage "the idle hand is the devil's workshop".

Nigeria has a large number of unemployed and unemployable graduates (Ene, 2008) The United Nations Human Development Report as at 1998 estimated

that 48.5 percent of the country's total population (i.e about 55 million) live below poverty level. The situation has not changed in the positive direction. In Nigeria, university, polytechnic and other higher school graduates, as well as secondary school leavers roam the streets without jobs or viable means of livelihood. It is unfortunate that Nigeria which has rich natural resources still wallows in poverty and gross unemployment. Wikipedia (2010) opined that Nigeria's economy is struggling to leverage the country's vast wealth in fossil fuels in order to displace the crushing poverty that affects about 57 percent of her populace. It shows that Nigeria as a nation co-exists with vast wealth in natural resources and extreme poverty. This is referred to as "resources curse". Despite the huge human and natural resources, Nigeria still falls among the poorest nations in the world today. This largely is due to bad resource management by her leaders. Thus, unemployment has become a major challenge in the country. Parents and guardians after huge investment on children/ward's education expect that after graduation, they will get gainfully employed, but the story is different as these young people after graduation roam the streets with no viable means of livelihood. Every year new sets of graduates join the squad of able bodied, unemployed youth'. The few who get jobs are not satisfied because what they are currently doing is far from their dreams, Imagine an Electrical Engineering graduate teaching in a Private Primary School! How can such how such a person be fulfilled and happy? Ewuzie and Ikeji (2010) affirmed that unemployment is the greatest challenge young people contend with and that as the scourge intensifies daily, not a few graduates are beginning to realize that job hunting is a lot more difficult than schooling. This paper discusses how counselling can be used to tackle violence and unemployment. The counselling profession is a helping relationship where an individual is guided and counselled either alone or in a group to understand himself and his situation with a view to maximizing his personal effectiveness and satisfaction as well as his usefulness to the society in which he lives.

Counselling and Conflict Management among Young People

The government at various levels has devised different strategies in curbing or reducing violence but most of these strategies focus on the immediate causes of the violence and neglect its root. Some of these attempts include passing of decrees, enacting and establish of regulations, use of religious persuasion etc. The counselling profession as a behavioural science looks beyond the remote cause and traces deviant, abnormal behavior to the roots. It is believed that violent behaviors are learnt, so they can be unlearned.

Any strategy or intervention that focuses on the roots will produce a lasting and sustainable peaceful life style. Since young people are the ones mostly involved in criminal activities, it becomes imperative that from the school (Primary,

secondary and higher schools) they should be taught skills that will help them manage conflicts. Violence reduction to the barest minimum level needs an elaborate prevention programme that will start early in life through the schools. One of such programmes is teaching basic conflict management skills. The counsellors in conjunction with the school administrators will have a work plan on teaching these skills.

Lee (2006) succinctly sums up that students should be taught practically the following on the management of conflict and violence:

1. Speak up! If you see or hear about something that is going on that may put people or you in danger, tell someone. If you are afraid of people finding out you talked, do it anonymously.
2. Think before you react. Before you make bad decisions, think first, react second.
3. Stop ragging, clowning, bullying and teasing people. You may not know when you have gone too far and could push him or her over the edge.
4. Make it stop. If someone's been bothering you, harassing you, abusing you physically or emotionally, make it stop by telling someone, such as a parent, a teacher or other trusted adult.
5. Do not play with guns
6. Stay clean and sober. It's hard enough to make intelligent decisions under pressure. Add drugs and alcohol to the mix and you become, well ...stupid.

Students should be taught how to use peer mediation in resolving conflicts and anger management skills. The school counsellors should identify children with violent behavioural tendencies and treat them early. These behavioural dispositions and attitudes should be at the finger tips of students through the constant reminder of the counsellor and other staff.

Vocational Counselling for Sustainable Development

The state of unemployment in Nigeria calls for more practical measures to stem the tide and thus, enhance sustainable development. Functional Vocational/Career Counseling is one of the tools that can be used in helping people make informed career decision. Many young people go to school without proper guidance and end up doing courses that cannot fetch them viable employment. To minimize the problem of unemployment, the Federal Government introduced Entrepreneurship Education in tertiary institutions and lately in Secondary schools The Federal Government in 2006, as earlier stated, directed that all tertiary institutions in the country should incorporate Entrepreneurship Education in their curriculum and set up Entrepreneurship Centres. These Centres help produce a crop of graduates with the appropriate entrepreneurial skills and attitude for creativity, innovation and

enterprise. These graduates will create rather than seek for jobs, thus reducing the rate of unemployment and poverty.

According to the United Nations Educational Scientific Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Report in 2008, entrepreneurship education would help achieve the following objectives:

- Raise the level of awareness among key stakeholders on entrepreneurship and enterprise creation as a viable and realistic option for career development
- Nurture and develop entrepreneurial characteristic in an individual and encourage that individual to become an entrepreneur while acknowledging that not all graduates of entrepreneurial studies will become entrepreneurs
- Raise awareness that entrepreneurship education is not reading books or writing essays
- Develop strategy, plans for activities at different levels targeting different players
- Develop innovation in young people and to develop their skills to identify, create, initiate business and work opportunity of which owning an enterprise is just one example
- Give young people opportunities to develop skills
- Focus on the idea of creating an entrepreneurship culture: and not limiting entrepreneurship education to teaching of business skills and learning about setting up a personal own business.
- Empower students with the competencies and skills necessary to prepare them to respond to their needs including running their own business, so that they become productive citizens

These are huge benefits on the economy of any nation. But how can Entrepreneurship education and the regular courses be integrated and coordinated for functionality? The Entrepreneurship Centres and programmes should be coordinated by professionals. The Counsellor should be one of the professionals that should work in the Centre because the counselling profession helps individuals understand self, potentials, limitations and environment (i.e opportunity in one's world which includes the world of work). Counsellors are trained to handle personal- social, academic and vocational problems and challenges. Thus, an Entrepreneurship Centre or programme without a trained and seasoned counsellor will not be complete. In counselling and guiding students therefore in both career and vocational/entrepreneurship decisions, the counsellor should be involved in the following:

- Assist students in the choice of subjects in the secondary school that will relate to their future career.

- Help students make informed career choices based on self assessment and job.
- Make Vocational/Entrepreneurship choices that are related to the course or subjects. The emphasis should be dual: becoming entrepreneurial in one's field of study and diversifying into other fields or related fields.
- Coordinate the programme in the Entrepreneurship Centre.
- Link students up with mentors in relevant fields
- Do follow up on students after graduation and youth service particularly on their employment status.

A counsellor who is well equipped and allowed to practice effectively can help students make meaningful career/vocational/entrepreneurial decisions. Once young people are settled and meaningfully engaged, it will invariably reduce the number of hands available for criminal activities.

Future Direction

In view of the huge benefits to be derived from counselling, there is the urgent need of redirection and adequate equipping of the counsellors in Schools. Though it is entrenched in the National Policy that counsellors or Career Masters should be in schools yet in practice not many schools have functional counselling outfits. Only few schools have practising counselors; even in schools where there are counselors, there are no In-Service training programmes to equip them with current market trends and behavioural therapies and strategies in handling deviant and violent behaviours. Counsellors need current exposures on new techniques of handling deviant human behaviours and market trends.

Conclusion

Counselling as a helping profession is useful in stemming the tide of violence in the country as it targets the root of violence and expose students to other techniques of handling conflicts. Teaching conflict management exposes young people to alternative avenues of sorting out differences /instead of taking up arms. Also counselling helps young people make meaningful career/vocational entrepreneurial decisions that will make them not to wait for white collar jobs but to become employers of labour. Meaningful busy hands will contribute to sustainable development in the society. The government should enforce compliance with its directives that all tertiary institutions should include in their curricula entrepreneurship training and the setting up of an Entrepreneurship Centre that should be well funded. The informal sector of the economy should be supported by the government and other stake holders because they cannot operate

effectively without the support of key players. The best of ideas may never translate to reality without the wherewithal to make it happen.

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