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COUNSELLORS ROLE IN PROVIDING QUALITY COUNSELLING SERVICES UNDER UNFAVOURABLE SECONDARY SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT IN DELTA STATE

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Abstract

The paper examined unfavourable environment affecting effective quality counselling practice in secondary schools in Delta State and the role of the counsellor. Some of these unfavourable conditions identified include hostility and non reception of counsellors by school heads, degrading treatment of counsellors, non provision of office and materials to operate, unfriendly hostile environment, crowded time table on the part of the school heads. This has resulted in low patronage of counselling services by students and teachers, increase cult activities in schools, bullying, truancy, examination malpractice, poor academic performance and wrong carrier choice among other vices. The paper suggested the role counsellors can play in the face of unfavourable environment to include personal commitment, resourcefulness, being innovative, creative and making personal sacrifice. In addition, counsellors should be good role models improvisation of materials and maximize every opportunity to offer Guidance and counselling services. On the way forward the paper recommended that CASSON at International, National, State, Zonal and Local levels should embark on massive advocacy and create public awareness to the stake holders and government agencies on the correct recognition of counselling services to promote quality and sustainable development. Set up monitoring teams at all levels to monitor and censor counselling activities to ensure professional compliance to duties as well as tackle challenges that confront practicing counsellors in the discharge of their duties.

Introduction

Guidance and counselling has been institutionalized in our educational setting in recognition of its prime importance in the life of individuals, whose society have been invaded by complex hostility, youth restiveness, criminal tendencies, mingled with ICT fraud and examination malpractice. In a society, where the quality of education has been watered down and students misguided in career choice and studies. There is increasing cases of academic under achievement, school dropouts, juvenile delinquency and myriads of graduates who cannot offer quality services. Despite the necessity of Guidance Counselling services in a bewildered society most school heads make school environment particularly hostile and unfavourable for counselling practice. It is against this back drop, this paper seeks to highlight some of the unfavourable conditions that hinder effective guidance and counselling practices in secondary schools and discuss the role of counsellors to ensure quality services are offered which will enhance quality education at the secondary school and serve as a catalyst for sustainable National development.

It is a fact that Guidance and counseling has been institutionalized in Nigerian education and training system (Denga & Ekoja, 2008). It is however sad to observe that what is in practice is a far cry from what is intended. Despite policies, directives, concerning full time practice of Guidance and counselling in schools, posting of trained willing and enthusiastic Guidance counselors to schools quality service is not offered. Numerous unfavourable conditions mutilate against the actual practices of Guidance and Counselling services in schools as a profession. This setback has resulted in poor guidance of students. It is common to hear Guidance Counselors in primary and secondary schools complain of their inability to effectively discharge their duties because of various challenges they encounter in the schools.

Unfavourable Conditions, Confronting Counselling Practice in Secondary Schools

According to Teibowei, J, Ayibatari. E and Osusu. B. (2018) profession is about the quality of practices and services rendered and the public status of the job. However, many professional counselors face precarious situations that affect the quality of services they render. Unfavourable environment are conditions, situations, attitudes that are unfriendly and do not promote smooth operation of counselling services. Some of these conditions are discussed below.

Counselling as a profession requires certain conditions and requirement from the system to ensure professional effectiveness, competence and best of practice to enhance quality education for sustainable national development. Adam (2004)

opined that If the missing link of fallen standard in education must be retrieved through the services of guidance counselors. Counseling must be given its prime position of importance in schools. This is paramount to ensure the pupils and students are well guided in academic guidance, students choice of career and personal social life. Conditions on the part of counsellors include quality time to attend to clients confidentiality of the process, the provision of materials, tools, conducive venue, and enabling receptive environment for the counsellors to operate. However, fulfilling these conditions at the secondary school possesses a very serious challenge. This is because counsellors at the secondary schools are confronted with hostility, resistance and lack of cooperation from school heads and teachers who see counselling as advice giving which anybody can do.

Hostility and Poor Reception of Counsellors

As part of ensuring professional counselling is carried out in schools to upgrade the standard of education, to tackle the myriad of academic, vocational, personal socio and other problems of students Guidance Counsellors were deployed to the various secondary schools, Despite these efforts by government agencies the true picture on ground is a far cry from the desirable. Igborgbor (2012) reported that a major challenge facing counsellor at the primary and secondary schools in Delta State is that of acceptance and recognition, According to him some school heads are hostile and not receptive to trained counsellors posted to their schools to serve. They see the deployment of a graduate to counselling duties as waste of human resources. Consequently, they assign the counsellors to teach just any subject and refuse to recognize the counsellor as a trained professional. To them counselling of students can be done by anyone and so, does not require special training. This is a major setback in the discharge of duties by trained counsellors. If quality education must be obtained, then the professional services of trained counsellors in schools is paramount.

Low Patronage

Another serious problem emerging from non reception of the school counsellors by school heads is that of low patronage from students and teachers. Since there is no public recognition by the school heads. Teachers and students see counselling activities as illegal and not worth their patronage. Cases requiring professional attention are referred to unskilled vice principals instead of the trained school counsellors deployed to serve that purpose and consequently, student's problems are not given the professional attention it demands, thus, students maybe misguided, the results are lopsided and undesirable career choice.

Non Provision of Facilities

Added to this is the fact that school heads in most of the schools refuse to provide basic facilities to operate the unit. Funds or facilities are not made available for counselling activities. No facilities are provided for counselling activities, leaving the counsellor psychologically demoralized. For effective counselling in schools there has to be a warm, cordial, acceptable and friendly environment as a base for the counsellor to operate. This is an issue CASSON at National level should tackle to ensure quality practice of the profession at the grass root.

Lack of Accommodation

Counselling services require good accommodation to ensure privacy and confidentiality. Sadly most of the schools lack accommodation, sufficient classrooms and offices. Majority of the counselors operate from the general staffroom. General staff room is too open and exposed for effective personal counselling. The tendency is that the clients may withhold back certain facts and not be psychologically free to open up entirely, thus students problems bugging them cannot be resolved. Solution can only be proffered for problems that are expressed. To refocus the link between quality education and sustainable National development the counsellor must through commitment fulfill the noble call to guide the students. The way forward demands personal sacrifice, diligence, discipline, being innovative and to see the job as a divine calling that must be fulfilled. Counsellors should endeavour to execute guidance services job description for school counsellors as approved by CASSON (2003). It is pertinent to remark that success in counselling in unfavourable environmental conditions can only be achieved through determination, perseverance and consecrated commitment by the counsellor.

Lack of Funds: One of the unfavourable conditions faced by school counselors is non-availability of funds like the bible adage "Money answers all things". Funds are needed to furnish counselors offices, provide equipments and working materials such as psychological tools, tape recorders, test materials, stationeries, to organize programs such as career day, orientation, induction on effective study habits, seminars, excursion trips to mention but a few. Such funds should be provided by the Ministry of Education through the school heads, but it is sad to observe that the usual slogan in most schools is "no money" thus counselors are financially handicapped. Should counselling activities cease because of lack of funds? No.

Hostile Attitude of School Heads, Colleagues: Reports from primary and secondary school counselors, suggest that most school heads show negative,

hostile or nonchalant attitude to professional Guidance and Counselling services in schools. Most school heads shrink back once there is request for fund the consequence is that students are misguided. Worse still is the fact that some school heads insist that no special office or attention should be given to school counselors. Thus counselors are neither permitted to attend association monthly meetings, seminars conferences while schools are in session. They are not sponsored to conferences and nor given the opportunities to attend. According to Igborbor (2012) Some school heads, label counselors who insist on fulltime practice as lazy and irresponsible. The question is what should be done? Stop counselling because of people's attitude? No! In the opinion of some school heads, counselling is the same as advice giving as such should not be assigned to one person. It is a task anybody can do hence the counselor pushed is aside. This is the true picture in most of the secondary schools. The above narrative cannot be correct because Guidance and Counselling is a service that should be offered professionally by a trained personnel.

Crowded Timetable: Counsellors have overcrowded period to teach in the timetable, they have equal or more number of periods to teach as other teachers and so are busy all day and face the problem of time to carry out counseling activities. Some of the counsellors are not recognized, and are not allowed to practice.

Shabby Treatment of Counsellors

In some of these schools the zeal of counsellors are demoralized due to the shabby treatment meted on them by some school heads. During general staff meetings some Principal/School heads would make derogatory sarcastic statements on counsellors. Statement such as "we are all counsellors" It is only lazy people that say they will counsel without teaching. "What kind of counselling", "Counselling my foot" "As a counsellor you must teach". All these attitudes, dampen the moral and enthusiasm of counsellors to perform their duties,

These hostile and unfavorable school environment confronting effective counselling services has numerous effects on the school system and quality of education. This has lead to epileptic counselling services in schools, it has invariably resulted in unfulfilled dreams, wrong career choice, frustration among students as well as academic setback. Our schools have turned to breeding ground for cultists and robbers, truancy, bullying has become a regular occurrence in our schools producing a picture of failure of the education industry to produce pupils and students found worthy in character and in learning. The end result is academic underachievement, lowered standard of education production of pupils and students who are experts in examination malpractice, impersonation of results,

youth restiveness, violence, school dropout, regret and lack of fulfillment of pupils and students as adults in the world of work and other personal socio matters because of poor career guidance at the point they seriously required it.

Effects of Unfavourable Environment on Counselling Services in Schools

Arowolo (2011) In his descriptive survey of problems of Guidance and Counselling services in Nasara State reported that non recognition of Guidance and Counselling as professionals and misconception of the role of a Guidance and Counsellors in schools form a serious setback to counselling activities in the state.

The effects are multifaceted both on the counselors themselves, the students, school community and the society in general. This will be discussed as follows:

Effects on the Counsellors

These problems of hostility, conflicting impression on the role of the school counsellors, unfriendly environment for Guidance and Counselling services in schools have resulted in negative effects on the counselors and quality of counselling services being tendered. One of such effects is loss of interest by trained counsellors, Due to the assignment of teaching subjects to some counselors, they abandon Guidance and Counselling services in the schools. Consequently, we have a situation where there are counsellors deployed to schools but no counselling services are rendered and the students are left ungraded

Effects on the Students

The side effect of such a situation on students includes non actualization of the goal of counselling in schools. The implication is that students are not guided and are left unattended professionally. Muola (2010) in his study using a sample size of 234 respondents of counselling programmes of primary schools at Nairobi province reported that indiscipline in schools, poor student performance and increase psychological problems are the resultant effects of poor implementation of counselling programmes in schools. In another vein Arowolo (2013) opined that increased behaviour problems such as cultism, youth restiveness, truancy, bullying, indulgence in examination malpractice and poor academic performance, as well as increase in the number of school dropouts are among the effects of unfavourable school environment. For counselling services this had resulted in poor implementation of Guidance and Counselling services in schools. From personal experience, the researcher had observed that drug addiction, alcoholism, wrong career choice, teenage pregnancy are some of the prevalent problems in secondary schools due to unfavourable environment for deployed counsellors to operate in schools in Delta State.

If the goal of introducing Guidance and Counselling into the tertiary curriculum resulting to subsequent training and deployment of Counsellors to schools must be achieved the conditions that make practice uncondusive and unfavourable in schools should be addressed as a matter of urgency. This is to salvage the society from decay, corruption, fallen education standard and a total collapse of the system. The students of today are the leaders of tomorrow. There can be no meaningful change in society when professional Guidance and Counselling is not given its proper place. The missing link is to ensure effective professional Guidance and Counselling Services are offered timely at the secondary schools.

The Role of the Guidance Counsellor in overcoming Unfavourable conditions

Counselling as we know is a calling, it is a helping profession. Counselling services in schools must not cease, should it? The answer is a big No. Counsellors must against all odds practice counselling through thick and thin. Therefore, because the environment is negative and unfriendly is not sufficient reasons for counsellors to down tools and not offer quality services. The following suggestions are roles and ways a determined counsellor can actually practice and fulfill his/her call as a counsellor despite the unfriendly environment to ensure quality education for sustainable National development is attained..

1. **Personal Commitment and Resourcefulness:** There should be personal commitment on the part of every counselor. The counselors should be willing to sacrifice their time, skills and initiative to promote effective counselling practice in schools. For example in the absence of a staffroom, the counselor can hold counselling sessions under trees within the school premises.
2. **Sacrifices Financial and Commitment:** Anything worth doing is worth doing well. Counselors should put in their finances where it is inevitable to ensure and secure the lives of the younger generation. It is not all about 'give me" give me'. You can also give out. Counsellors should copy a leaf from the developed countries who make huge sacrifice to cater for the needy and less privileged.
3. **Personal Credibility and Initiative:** Every counsellor should ensure that they establish credibility and secure recognition through hard work, integrity, transparency, and personal sacrifice. They should make their present felt in the schools. Efforts should be geared to win the confidence of the school authorities by initiating and executing Guidance and Counselling service which may not involve money for example organizing orientation for new intakes into JSS1, SS 1, for newly selected school prefects, for newly

recruited members of staff, for corps members posted to serve in the school for SS 3 students preparing for WAEC.

4. **Maximize Opportunities:** The counselors should maximize any given opportunity to execute guidance services; for example make use of free periods, school morning assemblies. This implies coming to school early, liaising with the Vice Principal in charge of morning assemblies to give brief lectures, life skills talks. The counselors can also make use of break periods to give talks. They can also float or join school clubs. Counsellors should advertise their services to the members of staff and to the students for personal counselling. In unfavorable conditions where the counsellor has no office; students or pupils could be counselled under trees within the school premises.
5. **Being a role model:** Counsellors should show exemplary lifestyle by being obedient to school authorities and executing their given assignments diligently. They must come early to school, and not miss their lessons. While in class advertise themselves as Guidance and Counsellors to the students. Counsellors should cultivate peaceful, friendly relationships in schools. They should sell ideas to their school Principals cordially, even when they appear hostile and unfriendly.
6. **Personal determination and creativity:** Counsellors should endeavour to discharge their duties. They should be determined to go an extra mile to ensure some form of counselling services go on in schools. They should be resourceful and creative and do something helpful for the students.
7. **Improvise:** Counsellors should use and provide materials available locally, for example you can use their personal relevant books to develop students counselling library, use the back of old calendars for pictorial Guidance services.

In an unstructured interview with 200 Guidance Counsellors from secondary schools at Asaba, Delta State about 75% of them complained that they were not allowed to practice fully as counsellors by school heads. The usual complain from school heads is that secondary school lack manpower and so the counsellors are not allowed to practice and instead they are cumbered with numerous periods to teach other subjects. Worse still, some patriotic counsellors in their zeal to help these students are not given the opportunities to provide the needed services. Rather the school heads set up committees to take over the task of advising students, thereby rendering the guidance and counsellors redundant effective and ineffective.

The question is what should be done in the face of this seemingly professional challenge by layman who are not trained counsellors, who usurp the duties of trained counsellors because they are so placed as heads of schools. This attitude is impacting negatively on counselling activities which affects the quality of education. Counselling profession is not advice giving in schools. It is not everybody that can provide these services. These are issues that confront the practice of Guidance and Counselling in schools. The true picture of counselling practice in Delta State is such that most counsellors have crawled into their shell. There are no effective counselling activities in some of the schools. The only activities held on school morning Assembles are general seminars or talks by religious organizations. For National development to be sustained through quality education, the counsellors must be recognized and given the rightful opportunity to discharge their professional duties. The counsellors themselves should be innovative and willing to make sacrifices.

Despite efforts to improve on counselling services in schools, much still need to be done. The issue of institutionalizing Guidance and Counselling in practical terms as a professional services in primary and secondary schools still has a long way to go and should be addressed for sustainable development.

Conclusion

This paper highlighted some of unfavourable conditions that hinder effective practice of counseling in schools, their effects, the paper also discussed the roles counsellors and CASSON as a body should play to tackle these unfavourable conditions. If Nigeria must grow beyond the present level, the need to activate and maximize the activities of trained counsellors is paramount and a sure way for positive change and refocuses on the missing link for sustainable National development.

If professional counsellors must make their impact in society and improve fallen standards of education, there has to be serious aggressive advocacy beyond paper work by CASSON at all levels on behalf of school counsellors, to school heads and relevant government bodies on the importance to create conducive environment for Guidance Counsellors to ensure counsellors discharge their duties in a warm, friendly and enabling environment for maximum output. The counsellors themselves should prove their worth through personal sacrifices, professional practice and impress the public as effective helpers and transformers.

Way Forward

1. This is where CASSON as a body need to rise up and expedite action in ensuring legislation and directives with Gazette bills and backup are issued from the National levels for effective professional practices in schools.
2. Monitoring agencies should be appointed by CASSON at all levels as fulltime workers delegated with the task of monitoring /follow up the counselling practice in school. They should also be empowered to receive complains from school counsellors and empowered to proffer solutions and act. This is because placement of Guidance and Counselling as a profession in primary and secondary schools is the true way out of the myriads of both education and other problems facing the nation especially the youths. The child of yesterday is the youth of today and the youth of today is the adult of tomorrow. Guidance and Counselling should be given its proper rightful place in the primary and secondary schools. Otherwise the problem of fallen standard in education and juvenile delinquency will continue to be a bull dog on the neck of this country.
3. Mass sensitization, advocacy and awareness should be created by CASSON body in the form of adverts, bill board, jingles with mass and local media. Organization of seminars for key stakeholders in the Educational industry e.g. Permanent Secretaries, C.I.E, Commissioners of Education, School heads, Directors of Education, Education industry, Ministry of Youth and Social development and Orientation agencies on the prime place of counselling in proffering solutions to the problems plaguing the education industry. The emphasis on the youth is because it is important to catch them young. When they are taught and counselled young, it saves Nigeria the stress of combating the menace of youth restiveness. As the popular saying goes 'prevention is better than cure' so 'catch them young' through quality professional counseling services in secondary schools becomes inevitable.

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