

GUIDANCE STRATEGIES AS TOOLS FOR SKILLS-ACQUISITION AMONG SCHOOL CHILDREN IN UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION PROGRAMME

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Abstract

This paper examines the necessity of guidance programmes in the achievement of skills acquisition as stated in National Policy of Education. The role of guidance service in meeting (the needs of the school child are identified. The strategies which are tools that aid skill acquisition among school children are discussed. Some problems that hinder the effective implementation of guidance services are also identified in the paper. Among others, it is recommended that professional counselors should be employed and posted to execute their professional duties just as the Government is advised to stop paying lip-service to the implementation of guidance service within the school setting.

Introduction

Education has been defined as a process that facilitates learning and acquisition of theoretical and practical skills that help mankind to utilize the environment effectively for personal and national development (Denga & Denga, 1998). This implies that skill acquisition is an integral part of the educational system of any nation. The level of skills displayed by an individual and the quality of competence exhibited confirm the impact of education on that individual.

The structure "of the colonial educational system in Nigeria was to service the manpower needs of their political and economic structure. At the attainment of independence in 1960, the need to change the colonial educational system became paramount. This is because it did not take cognizance of the needs of the indigenes.

Regrettably, our educators did not recognize these lapses until 1982. The educational policy that recognized the needs of Nigerians was put in place in 1982 and revised in 2004 as 6-3-3-4 system. The policy, among other objectives, emphasized acquisition of appropriate skills and competence and the development of mental, physical and social abilities as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of the society. The above provision, though laudable was poorly implemented through mere lip-service by the people and the government of Nigeria. It was against this backdrop that the Universal Basic Education (the 9-3-4 system) was proposed and implemented. Some questions come to mind here:

1. Would this new policy not go the way the earlier one went?
2. What are the laid down plans on how to impart skills acquisition on the children, particularly at the lower level?
3. What are the coping strategies put in place to confront the problem? In other words, how can guidance and counselling assist in actualizing the goals of the new policy, especially as it concerns the lower level?

The last question is the concern of this paper.

The Role of Guidance and Counselling in Meeting the Needs of the School Child

Primary (elementary) education consists of the first years of formal, structured education. In general, primary education consists of the first six or seven years of schooling, starting from age 6 and ending probably at 12 (here, it is the lower level). This age in a child's life is an

impressionable period which leads to pre-adolescent stage. During this period, a lot of changes take place within the individual. These changes are accompanied with their challenges. These challenges cannot be left unattended to. To effectively help the children to develop coping and other skills for adjustment, the need for guidance and counselling becomes imperative. Guidance can be defined as a formal, purposive, systematic, scientific and therapeutic service provided to assist the client identify his problems, enhance his potentials, develop his social and coping skills in order to adjust himself and be more productive in the society. Guidance and counselling is seen as the cog in the wheel of progress of our educational system. No wonder the blueprint on guidance and counselling for educational institution in Nigeria identifies the following areas where guidance services will play major roles in the lives of the recipients of education particularly at the lower level of the first 9 years of schooling.

- Assist to identify the developmental needs of the children.
- Assist the student to identify himself as a developing individual.
- Assist the student to identify his potentialities.
- Effect a smooth transits from home to primary school (9) and to secondary school (3).
- Encourage the student to cultivate the right attitudes and values.
- Help the child to identify and modify matadaptive behaviour.
- Encourage the student to develop along the areas of his strength.
- Assist the pupil toward making decisions on his choice of work.
- Assist the student to identify and be able to cope with early disabilities he may have.

A cursory look at the above areas of needs of these children shows that it expands

from educational through vocational to personal-social.

At the UBE levels, particularly the lower levels, the need to acquire skills is fundamental as enshrined in the objectives of the National Policy on Education. Guidance can assist the children to achieve educational objectives through organized activities in form of the guidance strategies discussed below.

Strategies as Tools for Assisting School Children for Skills Acquisition Orientation

This is an educational guidance service provided for new and fresh pupils/students through group procedure. It is to help them get acquainted with their new environment. Here, they are provided with information such as the history of the school, school subjects, facilities and extracurricular opportunities available. Also, the principal officers are introduced. Pupils are made to learn the traditions of the school. They are exposed to the rules and regulations guiding the operation of the school. During the programme, these pupils/students exchange ideas and learn more about working in a group setting. This strategy enhances the adjustment of the people concerned in their educational pursuit and interactions with others. It also provide them with skills for self management particularly at the UBE levels.

Career Forum

It is a vocational strategy which can last for one or more days. Individuals from different professions present their impressions about their occupations. Here, they deliberate on what they do, the benefits and hazards of the job, qualifications for entry, method of entry, remunerations and the like. Children are enlightened on various occupations. They also ask questions for classification. This facilitates decision making about occupations that could be of interest. The function of vocational guidance

at this level of UBE is early identification of children's potentials and provision of appropriate curriculum for them (Agali, 2008; Ossai, 2009). It should be noted that it is not only technical skills that are emphasized here; physical and social skills are also identified and developed.

Group Counselling

Group counselling is a formal, systematic and therapeutic interactive relationship between the counsellor and a number of counselee at a time. The problem handled ranges from educational through vocational to personal-social. There is universality of goals for group members. At the UBE level, emphasis is on self-knowledge and development of social skills.

Work Visit

Children career awareness can be harnessed if they are taken to the places of work. They are able to have a clearer picture of occupations and gain first-hand knowledge. This type of awareness is likely to bring about smooth transition from school to work. At the UBE level, career awareness outcomes emphasizes on decision making and is important both to oneself and the community. This strategy emphasis leads to recognizing personal attributes and preferences through career exploration. Focus here is on skill development.

Modeling

This is a therapeutic skills development strategy whereby children are taught new behaviours or made to strengthen existing ones either through watching as in the Bandura experiment way or by watching an acted or real scene and thereafter learn to behave in new ways by imitating the behaviour, values and attitudes of significant others in their lives. This allows the clients to get involved by actually performing the behaviour that is modeled in the counsellor or other model. Modeling offers a number of

exciting therapeutic possibilities because it is relatively easy to use and almost any behaviour can be modeled. The use of this strategy cuts across the three areas of needs of the school child (educational, vocational and personal-social).

Use of Cumulative Record Folder

This is an elaborate record showing a detailed biodata of the child, his academic records, vocational aspirations and other information. The items that are found in cumulative record include the following:

a. Biographical Data

These include names of students and parents, permanent home address, age, position in the family, health information, present class, sex, religion, state of origin.

b. Academic Records

These are scores and grades of subjects taken during the entire period of schooling.

c. Career Aspiration or Vocational Interest

Hobby, list of preferred vocations, choice of school subjects, engagement in extra-curricular activities are under this category.

d. Anecdotal Records:

This is a special behaviour exhibited by the individual during specific conditions.

Detailed study of information gathered from CRF enables the counsellor to assist the individual in acquiring positive interpersonal relationship and acquisition of skills needed for self actualization and fulfillment of personal goals.

Role Playing

This is a therapeutic process, where roles are switched. Through this strategy, the children are made to see why they should appreciate the challenges that confront the person (parents, teacher or the significant others) who they may

have been accusing of insensitivity to significant others how the home climate is effecting the child their positively or their plight. negatively.

Consultation with Parents and Significant others in the Lives of the Children Work Visit

The counsellor by virtue of his/her training understands the needs of the children. He/she explains to these adults the need to adequately interact with the children, especially because of the developmental processes the children are undergoing. Consultation services include interviewing their parents, teachers and member of their community. Here, the activities are for remediation of educational deficiencies. Adults are expected to spend quality and profitable time with the children, show love by listening to their challenges, share with them, talk together and be good models. These behavioural patterns on the part of the adults will go a long way in modifying the child behaviours, many of their doubts are also cleared. The children will also have a sense of belonging.

Referral Services

Counselling is an embracing professional service where clients are assisted to identify and cope with their varying problems (educational, vocational and personal-social). If the professional service is beyond the competence of the counsellor, the client is-directed to other professionals who are in a better position to resolve the client's problems. Such referral could be to professionals in the following professions: Medical, Social Welfare Labour, etc (Egbule, 1998).

Individual Counselling

This is a didactic, unique, dynamic, therapeutic and professional relationship between the counsellor and the counselee. The goal of the relationship is for the counsellor to assist the client to use his own inner resources to re-orientate himself/herself in a positive, meaningful and satisfying direction (Clifford, 2006).

Home Visitation

This is a situation where the counsellor visits the home of the clients. This act helps the counsellor to get acquainted with the home emotional, social and psychological climate of the home of the child. The interaction with the parents or significant others make assistance to the child more successful. At this point, the counsellor can explain to the parents or

Follow-Up Services

This is a service that involves monitoring the children's progress on a continuous basis after learning in the school. The counsellor ensures that the clients are well placed in life. This implies that the concern is for a lifetime. Besides, the counsellor also collects, collates and disseminates useful information, liaise with both teachers and parents to discuss matters relating to the child's educational, vocational and personal-social problems.

There is no gainsaying that the guidance counsellor assists in no small measure in helping the children to optimally realize their potentials and resolve their personal social problems. A close examination of these strategies utilized by the counsellor in assisting the children resolve their problems, explains why guidance is a fulcrum upon which the success of the

implementation of the skills-acquisition component of Nigeria education system is huge. In fact Okorodudu and Okoroduti (2002 and 2003) and Ossai (2009) stress that the Universal Basic Education (UBE) is fundamentally deficient without guidance counselling services.

Problems Encountered in Effective Utilization of the Strategies of Meeting Children's Needs in the School Setting

There is no controversy that the federal government appreciates the pivotal role guidance counselling plays in the achievement of the goals of education National Development. The government according to Esere (2004) in the third National Development plan made a categorical statement on guidance and counselling as follows:

It is further realized *that* for education to be complete, the beneficiaries must have a good sense of self-fulfillment. This particular feeling must go with the right choice of a career. Such choices are best identified at the secondary school stages of a student's education. The absence of career counselling in our educational and training system in the past must be held responsible for the frustration observed among many of the nation's young men and women. To remedy the situation career counselling will be institutionalized in all the national educational training systems (p.30).

Though guidance counselling has been institutionalized in the nation's education and training system, a number of factors still militate against its functional operations. The policies directing state governments by Federal Government to employ guidance counsellors are not very effective. Where counsellors exist, they are saddled with teaching subjects thus hindering them from functioning as professionals. Here, counselling is seen as an auxiliary function.

Another distressing situation is the lip-service pronouncement by politicians without substantial financial backing. All these

degenerate to non-provision of human and non-human resources for effective guidance services. This, unfortunately, hinders the implementation of laudable aspects of the educational programmes which lead to the acquisition skills for worthwhile and fulfilling life which guidance counselling stand for.

Recommendations

1. Government should stop paying lip-service to the implementation of guidance services within the school setting.
2. Professional counsellors should be employed and posted to execute their professional duties.
3. Facilities such as offices, furniture, psychological tests, books, computers and other *essential* support staff *should* be provided for effective guidance services.
4. In-service training should be provided for willing teachers.

Conclusion

Guidance counselling occupies a pivotal part in skill-acquisition in the Nigeria educational system. It is like the heart-beat of the educational process. To effectively achieve the educational objectives as stated in the National Policy on Education, the provisions for guidance and counselling must be implemented.

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