

# REPOSITIONING GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING SERVICE IN THE NATIONAL POLICY ON EDUCATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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## Abstract

At the inception of the implementation of the 6-3-3-4 system of education in Nigeria, Guidance and Counseling were described as the 'Cinderella' of the system. This paper examines the provision for Guidance and Counseling in the Nigerian National Policy on Education and the achievement of the national education goals as stated in section 1:7 of the National Policy on Education (1998). The paper further analyses the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) as regards education, and the inclusion of Guidance and Counseling in the Strategic National Education Plan (SNEP) as proposed by the Ministry of Education. In the light of these, the paper presents a prognostic analysis of education in Nigeria in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## Introduction

In all societies of the world, education is a main stake, most especially for national development. Education is critical to the preservation of existing culture in a society as well as to the channeling of new course for the development of the individual and the society. Therefore, for the effective maintenance of any society and the experience of a meaningful development, education is quite indispensable, both formally and informally. For these reasons, every nation packages it-education (usually in a policy or act) and makes it a priority or accords it a priority of place, especial!} in its national budget. Any nation that neglects the effective education of its citizenry is invariably neglecting its own development and this may spell doom for such a nation. Thus, the educational philosophy and policy of a nation, and how they are handled and implemented go a long way to tell and dictate the benefits reaped and effectiveness achieved on education. Consequently, they determine the impact which education will eventually have on the citizens in particular and the nation in general!

In Nigeria, the policy document on education is the 'National Policy on Education'<sup>1</sup> which was first published in 1977 and revised in 1981, 1998 and 2004. Tracing the history of western education in Nigeria changes in individual, societal and national needs and aspirations have greatly affected the quest for education and expectations from education. The advent of the European traders in the 14th century saw the western education as preparing the indigenes (i.e. Nigerians) to assist the European traders in keeping records and accounts of their trade. Afterwards, western education became a thing of prestige meant only for the royalty, then for the affluent and elite (who can afford it). The advent of the missionaries and the teaching of literacy for effective religious communication is of notable-recognition, shedding more light on the many benefits of western education. There was of course then, the indigenous education, which was limited in scope and globalization, and not as organized-methodical and systematic as the western education. With time and government intervention, the grammar school system was put in place, after the standard school had been in operation for many years. Due to changes in the society's expectations from education in meeting the needs of individual; and work organizations, the grammar school education became inadequate and insufficient for effective operation of the individual in the rapidly changing world and work organizations. Various conferences and commissions were set up to look into the problems in the Nigerian educational system. They came up with the 6-3-3-4 system of education, which is presently in operation. This system of education is laudable in principle and objective, and by implementation is expected to meet individual, society and national needs, leading to the achievement of Nigeria's national goals and national education goals (as stated in the NPE (1998) section 1:2, and 1:7 respectively). In documenting the National Policy on Education, some educational services were recognized as-being important in facilitating the implementation of the educational policy. One of such services is the guidance service. This paper therefore examines the provision for Guidance and Counseling in the Nigerian National Policy on Education and what this portends for education in Nigeria in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## **Guidance and Counselling in The Nigerian National Policy on Education**

The guidance services in the school system are essentially to stabilize the students and staff in order to position them to gain maximally from what the educational system has to offer, and also to enable them contribute maximally to the society, what the educational system had imparted on them. Hence, it is only reasonable to employ the services of guidance in the operations and implementation of educational system for maximum benefit. However, a careful examination of the National Policy on Education reveals that the provision made for guidance services is grossly inadequate and the roles of guidance services largely misunderstood. The perception of the policy makers as regards guidance services is myopic, and therefore detrimental to the accomplishment of the set national and education goals and objectives.

As pointed out by Achebe (1986), 'Guidance 'is given a Cinderella status in the 6-3-3-4 system of education' - an unimportant and neglected member of the education household. While teachers and school administrators are given pride of place in (he main stream of the policy, Guidance is given a mere mention as an education support service and counsellors are merely referred to as officers relevant only to post primary institutions just to solve students' career related problems and manage personality maladjustment among students. This suggests that curative counselling rather than preventive and developmental Counselling is emphasized. Thus not recognizing the fact that guidance is basic to all human endeavours and is more beneficial in preventive use than curative use.

Also, the provision made for the training of counsellors (i.e. training of interested teachers as counsellors), is obviously mere lip service. If otherwise, such would have been clearly stated and spelt out as was done for the training of teachers in section 6:B. Moreover, because the roles of the counsellor are not presented in specific terms, there is no establishment policy on the students/counsellor ratio as it is for teachers in section 10:101. There is also no provision for counselling units and this suggests that counsellors are not expected to be on full time guidance services, they are expected to combine counselling with teaching. More so, no financial provision is made specifically for Counselling programmes, thereby frustrating any efforts any counsellor could be making to perform his/her duties. No mention is made of the provision of other facilities and personnel necessary and important to the effective provision of guidance services e.g. physical facilities, referral personnel, health workers, psychologists etc. Without gainsaying, the present National Policy on Education has no good appreciation for the role of Guidance and Counselling in achieving effectiveness of the Nigerian National Policy on Education.

Consequently, achievements of the 6-3-3-4 system of education have been greatly affected, and the philosophy of education (section 1:4) has been adversely affected too. For instance, the role of the counsellor in achieving the philosophy and goals of education in Nigeria (the whole of section 1 of NPE) cannot be over emphasized, but because recognition has not been given accordingly, to the roles of the counsellor in the school system, the authorities in the secondary schools as well as the public (parents and guardians) have refused to recognize and yield to the counsellors' prompting on the educational placement of students based on their abilities and interest (as stated in section 1: (d) and consequently, students' inability to acquire competencies necessary for self reliance. After the JSS III examination, students are expected to be placed into the educational setting where their potential academic abilities and vocational skills could be perfected to the maximum benefit of the individual and the society at large. This suggests that some students (about 60% of total number of students that sat for the examination) are expected to proceed to the senior secondary school, while about 20% are expected to be placed in technical colleges and the remaining 20% to be placed on apprenticeship with government approved vocational skill training institutions. This however is not found to be so. Presently, every student, parent and guardian prefer the senior secondary school education. Even when the student does not possess the potential abilities for the academic rigours of the senior secondary school, he is still bent on or forced to prefer the senior secondary school option. The placement in technical colleges and apprenticeship is so detested and believed to be meant for the never do well students. Consequently, over the years, the nation has witnessed a lot of disheartening events and monumental vices like:

1. Poor performance of students in all subjects, in the senior secondary certificate examinations, every successive year.
2. Increase in examination malpractice by the year, as a result of:
  - (a) Students' academic incompetence

(b) Desperation for paper certificate

3. Lack of subject combinations: due to unavailability of guidance counsellors in schools to give appropriate and adequate guidance to students.

4. Lack of moral and academic values among students.

5. Lack of academic direction

6. Lack of self confidence in the students

7. Lack of proper human and academic development.

8. Cultism in primary, secondary and higher institutions.

These are just a few of the national embarrassments being contended with partly as a result of non effective use of Guidance and Counselling service in the schools.

In view of the above and some other lapses in Nigeria's education system, the federal government came up with the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), in which is included the reform on education. Anikweze (2004) stated that the NEEDS is a multi-sectoral reform representing the compendium of strategies for reforms in all sectors of the Nigerian society. The pivot for all these reforms still is education. Consequently the ministry of] education came up with its reform 'manual' - Strategic National Education Plan (SNEP) - which aims at nurturing a system that guarantees the total development of the individual and offers even Nigerian child and citizen the best of physical, intellectual, moral and spiritual development (Anikweze, 2004). The inclusion of Guidance and Counselling in the SNEP has not given Guidance and Counselling a better status than what it is in the National Policy on Education. The role of Guidance and Counselling in SNEP as in NPE. is curative rather than preventive.

As stated in the SNEP sector plan 2004 - 2007, S/N 1:5,6, for the eradication of examination malpractice in all institutions (1.5) and the eradication of cultism in secondary and tertian, institutions, the reinforcement of Guidance and Counselling services in the schools is one of the implementation strategies. This implies the reinforcement of the mis-representation of Guidance and Counselling and the continued use of curative guidance and counselling (as in the NPE) which presently is being considered as inadequate and ineffective. Moreover, the modality for the involvement of Guidance and Counselling services is not stated, just as it is presented in the NPE. It is another Cinderella status which eventually would be of no effect on the reform, moreso as the effect is expected to be accomplished and felt in the year 2005 . Moreover, s/n 2 goal in the sector plan 2004-2007 of SNEP focuses on improving quality of education content and delivery at all levels based on the targets and implementation strategies specifically focused and centred around teachers -training, retraining and in-service training, prompt payment of salaries, training in managerial skills, by the year 2007. Nothing was mentioned in this section about preventive Guidance and Counselling for quality and effective delivery of education at all levels, not to talk of paying attention to the training or retraining of counsellors for effective discharge of Guidance and Counselling duties and services.

### **Repositioning Guidance and Counselling in the National Policy on Education**

In all nations, education is packaged in a policy document or legislative act, always in line with the nations' needs and aspirations for the future. However, the benefits of education are reaped only when education is properly delivered to the citizens. In Nigeria, the policy package is laudable but the delivery package in some respects is inadequate. One of such respects is the provision of] Guidance and Counselling services. As pointed out by Owuamanam (2002), educational practices, policies and ideologies have been a subject of trial and error, uncertainty and experimentation, which are likely to have hindered meaningful development. Understanding of phenomena is the has:: ingredient for meaningful exploits, but no understanding can take place without genuine authentic and realistic information. Guidance and Counselling are all about fostering understanding of the self and the world, making realistic decisions and ensuring meaningful progress. Wherever these are lacking, meaningful development and progress will remain elusive. If students, staff, and general public are not well psychologically prepared through guidance, the effective acceptance and utilization of educational materials and programmes may not be profitably achieved. Guidance will prevent impediments to effective implementation of the nation's educational programmes in every respect. I will also ward off any disequilibrium in individual, society and national well being, as it will

ameliorate problems militating against stability and congruence in every aspect of living. It is only a healthy personality that can effectively utilize the provisions for education, achieve the national goals and contribute effectively to the development of his nation. This kind of personality can only be brought about by the consistent/constant use of Guidance and Counselling, as it is not a thing to be acquired once and for all times. In a situation where only lip service is being paid to Guidance and Counselling in the school system and community, much may not be achieved in terms of benefits from programmes (especially educational programmes) and a lot of funds will continue to go down the drain, achieving little or nothing. Though Guidance and Counselling practice is expensive, it is cost effective when used in preventive measure than curative measure.

### **Conclusion**

The effective use of guidance and counselling cannot be over emphasized. If out of ignorance or misunderstanding, guidance and counselling, have been erroneously accorded the status of Cinderella, it is high time this is corrected. We should not continue to grope in the darkness of ignorance at the detriment of developmental progress of the individual and the nation. As the EFA, NEEDS and SNEP are being put in place, efforts should be made to put Guidance and Counselling into proper perspective and appropriate use. Schools should be encouraged to develop community based guidance programmes to meet the needs of the students without alienating them from their society. If guidance is allowed to work in collaboration with other educational processes and personnel (teachers and school administrators), much more than what is being achieved presently will be achieved ultimately.

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