

QUALITY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: THE ROLE OF THE COUNSELOR AND OTHER MEMBERS OF THE SCHOOL FAMILY

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Abstract

The importance of quality education in nation building cannot be over emphasized. There have been calls on the educational managers to make the educational system to vibrant in the quality of its products after several quantity of mass failure and half baked products from various educational institutions in the country. It is a known fact that education is the instrument for economic empowerment and development in sustainable economy as well as national development. Quality learning is not only essential for meeting people's basic needs, but is also fundamental in fostering the conditions for global peace and sustainable development. The right to education is not only the right to access education but also the right to receive an education of good quality. Education must be not only available and accessible but also acceptable and adaptable. However, this paper discusses the role of educational counselors in assuring quality in the Nigerian education system, the concept of quality education, the role of other members of the school family quality education were highlighted. Some strategies for enhancing cooperation among the various staff in the school was recommended among which are organizing teachers forum, publications meeting, organization of parents forum, counseling committee and organization of seminars and workshops. The paper called for a collaborative effort between the members of the school family since no single individual can carry out all the functions in the school.

Education has been described as the bedrock of every society and tool for nation building. For quality education to be achieved in a nation the principal actors of learning who are the teachers, learners and the environment must be cooperatively organized. In other words, the teacher must be adequate in quality and quantity, the students must be well trained and facilities must be provided as well. In recent time, the upspring and rapid establishment of private schools and institutions in Nigeria is as a result of lack of confidence the Nigeria's education system which has adverse effect in the development of the nation.

Adepoju (2000) was right when he implied that people and nations are what they are because of the nature and types of education they have been exposed to. However, the modern view, even where only lip service is being paid to it, is that, quality education is the right of every citizen, not a privilege that the rulers may grant or withhold. This view has been given greater urgency by demands of the modern industrialized and technological age. Education today must have the effect of making it possible for a country to have a steady supply of highly creative citizens who will help to keep improving the living conditions of the general citizenry, and to solve the existential problems that are thrown up from time to time. Such problems are now being further complicated by the theory and reality of the so-called global village.

As is well known, the problem that government has is in reconciling access with quality in the provision of education. But, it is abnormal to describe education as anything that lacks quality. (Yoloye, 2005) agrees that quality must characterize education at every stage and the real problem that governments have to face is deciding the mix of levels, of how many of its citizens must go beyond the basic education and how many must have higher education? What goes on in Nigeria primary and secondary schools today bears little resemblance to the situation first described. One seldom hears of inspectors of education today at least of the variety which actually goes round and ensures good standards in primary and secondary schools.

It was claimed that, it is partly because they are now more schools, but this needs not to be so. The real reason is that, after the ill-advised takeover of all primary and secondary schools by the government of the federation, education has become bureaucratized and subjected to the unenterprising attitude of the Nigerian Public Service. It is doubtful, if children in schools today have seen inspectors visit their schools. That is why today many primary and secondary schools are turning into shopping malls. The learning environment has equally woefully deteriorated. There are many so-

called primary schools that have no furniture, and in many cases, even no doors and, or windows, and all in such hideous structures. Little wonder, then, that all those who can afford it give the government school a wide berth, a trend which is now raising the cry commercialization of education in the country.

Concept Clarification

Concept of Quality Education

Education in Nigeria is overseen by the Ministry of Education. Local authorities take responsibility for implementing policy for state-controlled public education and state schools at a regional level. Quality education is a high-sounding ideal, but its meaning is often vague. For years, the education system in Nigeria has placed a strong emphasis on the acquisition of knowledge and the development of academic skills. However, in the 1990s, there have been calls to broaden the goals of education, and to view the development of the whole person as the ultimate goal of education. Quality education is not an easy concept to quality. At a time when we are discussing quality education for all our learners it is important to take time to understand this concept.

The document, "Tomorrow's Schools" (2001) had asked the following question: "What are considered to be the basic requirements of a quality education?". One that is meaningful, worthwhile, responsive to individuals and social needs – and does each and every student, without fail, get those requirements? Regulated as these are by the principle of entitlement According to the Education For All: "Global Monitoring Report 2005" – "The Quality Imperative (EFA: GMR)", two principals characterize most attempts to define quality in education: the first identifies learners' cognitive development as the major explicit objective of all education systems. The second emphasizes education's role in promoting values and attitudes of responsible citizenship and in nurturing creative and emotional development.

Quality determines how much and how well children learn and the extent to which their education translates into a range of personal, social and developmental benefits. Goal 6 of the Dakar Framework for Action (2000) emphasizes the need of a stimulating pedagogy. It is the teaching and learning process that brings the curriculum life; that determines what happens in the classroom and subsequently, the quality of the learning outcomes.

A Counselor

A counselor is a trained mental health professional who aims to create a confidential relationship with people in distress so that they can safely express their thoughts and feelings and make sense of painful or confusing experiences. This process allows people to find for themselves the best way to manage problems, make changes in their lives, and often the symptoms will dissipate. Many people will, at some point in their lives, find themselves in the role of a counselor without having a true understanding of the concept of counseling or what the role of the professional counselor entails.

There is a big difference between a professional counselor and a person who uses some counseling skills as part of their role, for example, their role as a friend or colleague. A professional counselor is a highly trained individual who is able to use a different range of counseling approaches with their clients.

Counseling is:

- The process that occurs when a client and counselor set aside time in order to explore difficulties which may include the stressful or emotional feelings of the client.
- The act of helping the client to see things clearly, possibly from a different view-point. This can enable the client to focus on feelings, experiences or behavior, with a goal to facilitating positive change.
- A relationship of trust. Confidentiality is paramount to successful counseling. Professional counselors will usually explain their policy on confidentiality, they may, however, be required by law to disclose information if they believe that there is a risk to life.

The Roles of School Counselors in Quality Education

- Professional school counselors ideally implement a school counseling program that promotes and enhances student achievement (Hatch & Bowers, 2003, 2005; ASCA, 2012). A framework for appropriate and inappropriate school counselor responsibilities and roles is outlined in the ASCA National Model (Hatch & Bowers, 2003, 2005; ASCA, 2012).
- School counselors are employed in elementary, middle, and high schools, and in district supervisory setting and in counselor education faculty positions, and post-secondary settings doing academic, career, college readiness, and personal/social counseling, consultation, and program coordination. Their work includes a focus on developmental stages of students' growth, including the needs, tasks, and students' interest related to those stages (Schmidt, 2003).
- Professional school counselors meet the needs of students in three basic domains: academic development, career development, and personal/social development (Dahir & Campbell, 2002; Hatch & Bowers, 2003, 2005; ASCA, 2012) with an increased emphasis on college access. Knowledge, understanding and skill in these domains are developed through classroom instruction, appraisal, consultation, counseling, coordination, and collaboration. For example, in appraisal, school counselors may use a variety of personality and career assessment methods to help students explore career and college needs and interests.
- School counselor interventions include individual and group counseling for some students. For example, if a student's behaviour is interfering with his or her achievement, the school counselor may observe that student in a class, provide consultation to teachers and other stakeholders to develop (with the student) a plan to address the behavioural issue(s), and then collaborate to implement and evaluate the plan. They also provide consultation services to family members such as college access, career development, parenting skills, study skills, child and adolescent development, and help with school-home transitions.
- School counselor interventions for all students include annual academic/career/college access planning in Nigeria and leading classroom developmental lessons on academic, career/college, and personal/social topics.
- School counselors develop, implement, and evaluate school counseling programs that deliver academic, career, college access, and personal/social competencies to all students in their schools. For example, the ASCA National Model (Hatch & Bowers, 2003, 2005; ASCA, 2012) includes the following four main areas:
 - ❖ Foundation – a school counseling program mission statement, a beliefs/vision statement, SMART Goals; ASCA Student Standards & ASCA Code of Ethics;
 - ❖ Delivery System – how school counseling core curriculum lessons, planning for every student, and individual and group counseling are delivered in direct and indirect service to students (80% of school counselor time);
 - ❖ Management System – calendars; use of data tools; use of time tool; administrator – school counselor agreement; advisory council; small group, school counseling core curriculum, and closing the gap action plans; and
 - ❖ Accountability System – school counseling program assessment; small group, school counseling core curriculum, closing-the-gap results reports; and school counselor performance evaluations based on school counselor competencies.

Relationship between the Counselor and Other Members of School Personnel

Adeleke (2000), noted that, in most Nigerian schools that the different groups of people working in the school have different focus or areas of specialization. The above reason has made some of these workers to feel that counseling duties should be meant for counselors alone.

The teacher believes that his duty in the school is only teaching, the principal and vice principal believe in administration etc., all things being equal they are expected to help the counselor in his job by referring the maladjusted students to the counselor. The counselor in turn makes references to the above personnels after identification of the child's actual needs. This call for re-orientation of different groups of personnels within the school system. They need to be enlightened on the positive impact of collaboration for the overall achievement of educational objectives. There will be a great improvement in the quality of education in Nigeria secondary schools if the counselors and other school personnel perform their duties harmoniously.

The Counselor and the Principal

The principal is the father of the school, an authority figure, decision maker, a planner, a motivator and an evaluator in the school administration. What he permits goes on in the school. For either the counselor or principal to discharge their duties in the school successfully, both need the cooperation and support of the other. If they do not cooperate with one another, the school and students in particular will suffer. Iwuama (2004), noted that the present schools system, the counselor occupies a powerless position while the principal is the power base. He therefore, stated that, the counselor needs the support of the principal in order to implement his guidance programme in the school and to get staff and students' cooperation. The principal should know that the counselor is a partner in the educational progress. The counselor should encourage the principals' ideas and help by trying to maintain good relationship at all times.

The Counselor and the Vice Principal

The vice principal plays an important role in the day-to-day administration of the school. He is second in command in the administration of the school, he plays the role of the principal when the principal is not around and so there is need for cooperation within the schools counselors and the vice principal for the smooth running of counseling programmes.

Counselor and Teachers

The teacher comprises of the heads of departments, subject teachers and form teachers. The primary assignment of the teachers for which he is trained, is teaching. Both the teacher and counselor have similar goals of maximizing of students' academic and moral growth in the school. The concern of the counselor is to facilitate personal growth in students, so that they are better and able to take advantage of what they teachers have to offer. The counselor and teachers should develop a healthy respect for each other's strength with a conscious effort to minimize each other's shortcomings.

The Counselor and the Parents

Parents are the ones very much interested in and anxious about the wholesome development of their children mentally, physically, emotionally, socially and morally. They have common goals with both counselors and teachers as far as the welfare and development of the children are concerned. The counselor does the following:

- a) Invite and involve parents in school guidance seminars, workshops, conference, career weeks/day(s) etc.
- b) Ask parents to observe their children at home and in the community and make reports of their observations to counselors.
- c) Seek the opinion of parents in certain vital issues that concern their children.
- d) Assign specific roles to parents in some guidance activities such as publicizing guidance programmes.

The School Health Team

The school health team is made up of the school nurses, physicians, dentists and psychiatrist. In Nigeria, schools rarely have full time services of any of the above specialists except in the privileged schools where full-time nurses could be employed. The school nurses and other members of the school health team should be responsible for providing basic preventive health services for the student. They can identify children who need special medical treatments or referrals for the alleviation or correction of defects. They screen the child's health history and note health factors such as accidents, operations, impaired hearing, poor eyesight or developmental difficulties.

Counselor Student Relationship

There is need for the counselor and students to have good relationship because the students are the recipients of the counseling services. The counselor should therefore, have the interest of the students in mind. The counselor should create awareness of his functions to the students by being active in his counseling duties. The counselor should try as much as possible to make students have confidence in him. The counselor is expected to be fond of the students. Denga (2002), noted that, because of the counselors helping relationship in the school, he becomes very popular among students

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to the extent that most of them prefer to take their problems to the counselor instead of the principals or any other staff. Without establishing good relationship with the students the counselor can do little or nothing.

Conclusion

It is clear and evident that the educational counselors' role in achieving quality education cannot be over emphasized. Nigeria's educational system is totally in shambles as inadequacies are the order of the day with human and material resources. Assurance for quality education is a total holistic process concerned with ensuring integrity of outcomes. Thus, the responsibility for quality assurance rests with the schools' counselors and this is expressed through its relationship with other stakeholders in the school system. Also, the task of providing quality education to students is a collaborative effort between the counselor and other members of the school family. For this reason every personnel regardless of status, interest and affiliation should work together to ensure that students benefit from educational programmes. It is therefore, expected that every personnel involved with the progress of the students interacts more, understands one another and avoids bitterness and disharmony. It is only when different groups within the school setting collaborate and cooperate that quality education will be achieved.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are put up as means of enhancing collaboration among staff members:

- ❖ **Organizing Teacher Forum:** The school counselor should organize a forum for teachers and other staff where every member of the staff will be enlightened on the achievement of a common goal.
- ❖ **Meetings:** There should be regular meetings held among staff to promote positive interaction and exchange of ideas. The issue of common concern should be addressed and each member should be allowed to make contributions.
- ❖ **Organization of Parents Forum:** Parents should be involved in the discussion of the welfare of their children during such forum.
- ❖ **Counseling Committee:** The school counselor should form an inter guidance and counseling committee for the school. The major aims of the committee should be the provision of adequate guidance services to students to promote cooperation among staff and enhance quality education.
- ❖ **Organization of Seminars and Lectures:** The school authorities should organize seminars and lectures from resource persons on the need for healthy relationship among staff. This will provide opportunities to staff to appreciate the duties being performed by different groups of personnel.

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