

THE RELEVANCE OF QUALIFIED GUIDANCE COUNSELLORS IN EDUCATIONAL ENTERPRISE: IMPLICATION FOR THE ATTAINMENT OF MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS (MDGs) IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper discusses the role of Guidance Counsellors under the umbrella of education in the attainment of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as a fundamental effort for the realization of vision 20:2020 in Nigeria. It showcases the importance of Guidance and Counsellors in the education enterprise which serves as a viable instrument for the achievement of remarkable social progress. In view of the importance of Guidance Counsellors in socio-economic and political development of Nigeria, the paper stresses the need for the training and development of more Guidance Counsellors through workshops, seminar and the incorporation of the career masters for effective and efficient Guidance Counselling objectives. The paper concludes with a call on government to recruit more qualified Guidance Counsellors and make provision for infrastructure and instructional resources in our schools.

Development of any given nation does not come by chance. It requires certain workable strategies to be put in place. Thus, the initiative that culminated into what is known as “Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)” is a purposeful plan to arrest under development in the African continent (Nigeria inclusive) from all angles. One of the key elements of the policy is the universalization of quality education adopted by the member nations. This vital element therefore serves as a link between the MDGs and Guidance Counsellors.

The fulfillment of the adage that a student should pass through school and allow the school to pass through him makes the functions of the school counsellors inevitable in the scheme of things if students are to derive educational benefits from schooling. Thus, the attention of Guidance Counsellors is the production of useful citizens who would contribute substantially to the total development of the nation and uplift its image in international scene. This paper therefore addresses the role of qualified Guidance Counsellors in educational enterprise and the need for training and development of Guidance Counsellors for the achievement of MDGs which has been assumed as a stepping stone to the attainment of the global economic plan referred to as ‘vision20:2020’ and any future developmental plan in Nigeria.

Guidance and Counselling

According to Hornby (2006) Guidance means to direct, to assist, to inform, to lead or to steer. Durojaye (1976) cited in Madu (1999) visualized Guidance as the presentation of knowledge, information and advice to people, individually or in a group, in a carefully structured manner so that the individual or group has sufficient materials, ideas, examples and experience which enable the individual or group to make choices or decisions. Counselling refers to the core of the guidance activities. Pietrofesa in Anyakoha (2001) conceptualizes counselling as a relationship between

professionally trained, competent counsellor and an individual seeking help in gaining greater self understanding, improved decision making skills and developmental growth. This relationship encourages relaxation, learning of new behaviours and knowing oneself, the facts of one's present situation, the possibilities and choices he may make.

From the above exposition, it is obvious that Guidance and Counselling are two inseparable terms that compliments each other. However, Guidance is a broad term which is applied to the total programme activities of the school aimed at helping students to attain their life desires and contribute their quota to societal advancement; While Counseling is seen as the heart of Guidance and a portion of Guidance services.

Who is a Qualified Guidance Counsellor?

The role of Guidance Counselling is very vital in the school programme of events. This is based on the fact that at one time or the other, students find themselves in a complete state of confusion which demands having someone to share their problems with inform of counselling in order to have sense of direction. This assertion makes it mandatory for the school to have qualified Guidance Counsellor. Having said that, a counsellor can be referred to as a person who after undergoing an instructional training in Guidance and Counselling uses his/her wealth of experience to guide or assist the students (client or counsellee) to achieve his life desires educationally and vocationally. Iliya (2001) perceived a qualified counsellor as "a special teacher whose major role is to assist the individual through counselling relationship towards self understanding, planning, decision making and coping with problems relating to his developmental needs and to his educational and vocational activities". By and large, the professional functions of a counsellor is the total development of the individual students to live a self-fulfilled life and contribute to the development of their various communities. In conceptualizing the functions of a Guidance Counsellor, Ipaye (1983) identified the following:

1. **Communication:** Counselling is a form of verbal helping encounter, hence, the counsellor talks and gets others talk out their problems. However, talking alone does not constitute counselling. The lay man may think that the counsellor is merely chatting aimlessly with a counsellee whereas (the counsellor is actually following definite techniques depending upon the counsellee's responses, reaction, attitudes, feelings and emotions, as well as non-verbal responses).
2. **Provision of Services:** Counsellors provide various services which concern the entire individual such services range from providing orientation to pupils, parents and teachers; getting and giving information in the areas of personal and social development (e.g. as pertain to the broad scope of living with one's self and with others).
3. **Information:** Counsellors provide information on the school, its curriculum, its aims, procedures, facilities and politics, providing pertinent information about occupations, careers and the world of work in a way that these would help individual students develop appropriate career plans.
4. **Record Keeping:** The counsellors are also concerned with records on every student in the school. They keep folders containing necessary personal data, vital statistics, health information, academic grades or marks, psychological test scores, attendance records, honours, achievements, episodic occurrences in the child's life and general or specific trends in the child interests.

5. **Counselling:** Counselling remains the back bone of the functions of the counsellor. He counsels students on personal one-to-one basis, working with them in exploring their personal problems, the cause, and alternative ways of handling the problem or dealing with a behavioural trait.

From the above deliberation, it is cleared that the work of Guidance counsellor is enormous and very tasking, all in an attempt to bring out the best of the Nigerian citizens for national development.

Qualities of a Qualified Counsellor

Having identified some of the functions of a Guidance counsellor, it is pertinent to highlight certain characteristics expected of him/her to possess. Some of these qualities are:

1. **Adequate level of training:** The counsellor must be well trained in the art of counselling and human relations.
2. **Patient and understanding:** He is not in a hurry when helping the other person, he is not bored, and he listens attentively and patiently. He attends wholly and totally both psychologically and physically to the counsellee. Thus, patience understanding enables the counsellor to respond from the frame of reference of his counsellee and to be concrete in his expressions thereby dealing directly with the counsellee's actual feelings and behaviour rather than mere generalities of vague formulations.
3. **Emphatic understanding:** This is the ability to transpose oneself imaginatively into the feeling, thinking and acting of another. Therefore, counsellor must possess emphatic understanding to be able to display his professional wealth of experience to guide the counsellee in the right direction.
4. **Sense of humour:** The counsellor's sense of humour helps in building confidence in the counsellee, thus making him open up. Therefore, developing sense of humour is an important quality the counsellor must possess.
5. **Social Intelligence:** The counsellor should have good social intelligence. He has to develop an extensive repertoire of social-emotional skills that would enable him respond spontaneously and effectively to a wide range of human needs. (Ipaye, 1983).

A qualified Guidance Counsellor should possess the following qualities in addition to the above:

1. **Mastery of Subject:** He would be able to guide the client adequately to the right direction, as the client would feel free to open up on his/her own violation.
2. **Kindness and Untiring Spirit:** Because of the complex nature of Guidance Counselling, Counsellor should be kind, soft-hearted and be up and doing in dealing with different faces and different problems.
3. **Tactical:** Counsellor should explore different methods of assisting his client to discuss freely with him/her so that he would be able to guide the clients adequately to the right direction, as the client would feel free to open up his/her violation.
4. This would enable him get the necessary information required for proper and adequate counselling of the clients. The above qualities serve as prerequisite to the optimum performance of professional guidance and counselling activities.

Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

Millennium Development Goals have been adjudged as the broadly supported, comprehensive and specific development goals the world has agreed upon. In September 2000, 189 world leaders met at the millennium summit and committed themselves and their countries to eight goals known as Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) aimed at meeting the needs of the world's poorest people. (UNDP, 2005) The eight goals of the Millennium plan cited in Bulus, (2010) are:

1. Eradications of extreme poverty and hunger.
2. Achieving Universal Primary Education.
3. Promotion of gender equality and empower women.
4. Reducing child mortality.
5. Improving maternal health.
6. Controlling HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases.
7. Ensuring environmental sustainability.
8. Developing a global partnership for development.

The above goals are to be met in partnership with the world's leading development institutions by the target date of 2015. It is obvious from the above goals that the millennium plan is well conceived, articulated and targeted towards human development objective which make life worthy of living for all citizens of the third world countries such as Nigeria. It is worthy to state that Nigeria has since started implementing different developmental programmes geared towards meeting the target of the Millennium Development Goals. Notable among the programmes are the Universal Basic Education (UBE), National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (NEEDS) initiated by Olusegun Obasanjo and 7-point Agenda initiated by late Sheu Musa Yar'adua in 2007. It is hoped that effective implementation of these programmes would go a long way towards achieving MDGs which is adjudged as a prediction to the attainment of vision 20:2020 in Nigeria.

Guidance Counsellor and Attainment of MDGs

The introduction and development of guidance and counselling as a school programme was a starting point of a plan to make Nigerian children benefit maximally from the academic activities. The reason being that quality education is a powerful mechanism for achieving any developmental programme. Therefore, the place of Guidance Counsellors in the attainment of MDGs is not quantifiable. MDGs is a purposeful plan to salvage the under developed Countries of the World from the extreme hunger, poverty, diseases, spreads of HIV/AIDSs, However, without education all these cannot be actualized, thus education remains a fundamental instrument for the achievement of human development target encapsulated in the MDGs. In this context, Guidance Counsellors with their level of training help the citizens especially, the school going age to actualize their educational and vocational desires which enable them live responsibly and contribute to social advancement.

Moreover, counselling services rendered by the Guidance Counsellors serve as transformational and formidable instrument for socio-political and economic well being of the counsellee in particular and Nigeria in general. Guidance and Counselling involve provision of useful information necessary to make the students utilize their potentials not only for their improvement, but improvement of the society as a whole. Guidance Counsellors, through quality counselling services is capable of reducing poverty and hunger if not totally eradicated. This is because Guidance counsellors provide adequate vocational informations to the students and counsel them to make use of the

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opportunities in accordance with their intellectual and social capacities. Therefore, this helps a lot in reducing the rate of dependency on the parents and other family members as well as reducing the level of criminal tendency among the youths. According to Anyakoha (2001) Guidance Counsellors provide face-to-face assistance to the students to enable them arrive at a sound decision, based on an understanding of themselves, on information about education and occupations, and on careful weighing of alternate courses of action.

Guidance counsellors role in the achievement of universal education cannot be underestimated. They are the developers of students' potentialities. They assist the students to choose a life career that is suitable to their academic achievements. Accordingly, they help in the placement process of the students from time to time. Guidance counselors also assist in the management of academic crisis and challenges that could mar the educational attainment of the students. In this regard, Rahmat and Tijani (2011) identified the following areas of needs within the school setting which Guidance counselors respond positively to:

Table 1: Guidance Needs of Pupils in Primary Schools

1	Personal & Social	Educational
2	Dysfunctional/Unstable Family Background	Literacy & Numeracy/Remedial Teaching
3	Management of Emotions especially Anger	Attendance Absenteeism & Dropout
4	Lack of Self Esteem	Poor attitude, motivation & concentration
5	Bereavement, loss & abandonment. Disruptive pupils Signs of Neglect	Language & Communication skills, Change in Curriculum

Source: National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE, 1999). With little modifications

In terms of promotion of gender equality and women empowerment, Guidance counselors counsel the female students against casual sex and unwanted pregnancies as this constitutes an hindrance to their educational development thereby wilding the gap of educational inequality between them and their male counterpart as well as contributing to the level of marginalization of womanhood in all facets of human endeavours. Accordingly, Guidance counsellors contribute immensely in the campaign against HIV scorge. They collaborate with the medical practitioners to create public awareness on the removal of social stigma on HIV/AIDs victims in order to foster social adjustment. in addition, qualified Counsellors to the various Government hospital to render counselling services in this respect. Counsellors contribute to a greater extent to the socialization processes of the students through counselling them on the acceptable social values such as self-understanding and determination, obedient to constituted authority, patience and ability to acceptance of social change and social responsibility. All these are necessary to lay solid foundation for the achievement of any developmental plan such as MDGs. Counsellors also compliment the classroom instruction in imparting useful life skills and healthful habits into the students to enable them live in a disease free environment.

From the foregoing deliberations, education is vital and crucial for the success of MDGS. Thus, the relevance of Guidance Counsellors in this development plan is enormous within the realm of the school in particular and education in general. Therefore, Guidance Counsellors prepare the Nigerian children to make remarkable socio-economic, political and technological development of the nation of which the goals of millennium development hanged. According to Ezeji (2001) the belief in

guidance is that the world would be a better place if every one is assisted to develop his potentials in a manner that is useful to himself and to other members of the society.

Training and Development of Guidance Counsellors

Educational enterprise represents a broad field which presents a lot of learning experiences and opportunities. So, in an attempt to select certain types of knowledge and career, specialized counselling services are required to streamline students into various disciplines and departments based on their learning abilities and interests. This therefore underscores the need for training and development of Guidance counselors to take care of this and other essential services in the ever increasing students enrolment in schools for better performance. In view of this, specialized counselors and any other persons saddled with the responsibilities of counselling in schools should be exposed to appreciable levels of training and development in the profession. This could be done through the following:-

- a. Regular seminars/Conferences should be organised by the governments to broaden the scope of knowledge of these categories of people on counselling profession.
- b. Workshops should also be organised on a regular bases for both professionals and career teachers where different approaches to various cases requiring counselling would be discussed and experiences shared.
- c. In, house workshops can also be organized by the school authorities where external professional counsellors are invited to give a talk on any issue or topic so selected.

The above become apparent in view of low level reading culture of most teachers and insufficient instructional materials in most of the Nigerian schools. Thus, training and development of this nature would give the career masters and other subject teachers' opportunities to appreciate and work willingly with the professional counsellors for the benefits of the students and the nation at large.

Conclusion

From the discussion so far, it is stipulated that the relevance of Guidance counsellors in the realization of MDGs is vital. This is because, counsellor render services of inestimable values towards the production of effective and efficient citizens who can pursue vigorously, human development objectives enshrined in MDGs. Thus, the vision and mission of Guidance Counsellors is total development of the Nigerian citizens.

Recommendations

Based on the values of Guidance Counsellors in education for national development which constitutes the target of the millennium goals, the following recommendations are made:

1. Government should recruit more qualified Guidance Counsellor to take care of enrolment population in primary, post primary and tertiary levels of our educational system.
2. Government should also provide adequate infrastructure and instructional resources in the various schools. This would make the work of Guidance Counsellors very easy.
3. Regular workshops should also be organized for Guidance Counsellors and career master to keep them abreast of new techniques in counseling services.

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