
The Role of the School Counsellor in the Guidance Provisions of the National Policy of Education

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Abstract: *Guidance and counselling began as an identifiable aspect of the Nigerian educational enterprise in the 1950s. It is a discipline that stated from the establishment of the happenings in the United States of America which also influenced its establishment as a discipline in Nigeria. Despite many years of the promulgation of the National policy on Education and its prescriptions with regards to the relevance of guidance and counselling, the discipline undermines the contemporary utility of counselling in terms of individualization of learning and the realization of the potentials of the learner. This paper therefore examined the issues, its status overtime and possible reasons for such. The paper also shows why the policy must be reactivated by providing evidence that students learn best when properly guided, motivated and follow-up. It recommended that guidance and counselling be elaborately acknowledged as an essential component of all levels of the educational system in Nigeria.*

Introduction

The need for and advantages of guidance and counselling in the three tier educational institution is common knowledge now and the advocacy for such from educated quarters has been in the air for as long as we can remember. From the mid 50s the debate on guidance and counselling has been alive in Nigeria, culminating in the provision for it in the National Policy on education (NPE, 1977).

However, the stark reality is that between rhetoric and implementation, there is hardly any step forward to push guidance and counselling to the primary and the secondary area is scarcely populated with counsellors who also combine teaching with little or no counselling. In the tertiary institutions, the provision is minimally managed as no counselling is actually taking place. In spite of the fine reasons of the policy, there is no perceptible movement for the dial. This paper essays to look into the role of guidance and counselling as provided in NPE, the gains so far, the difficulties and the way forward. As guidance and counselling is woven into the NPE, its accomplishments are assessed in relation to the NPE in the whole situation.

The National Policy of Education

In 1977, the federal government of Nigeria published its National Policy on Education (NPE), which was revised in 1981. Government endorsed its total commitment and support to the counselling movement by stating that:

In view of the apparent ignorance of many young people about career prospects and in view of personality Maladjustments among school children, career officers and counsellors will be appointed in post-primary institution; guidance and counselling will also feature in teacher education programme.

Some of the relevant areas to guidance and counselling in NPE (1977) are outlined below:

Serial no	Section	Page	Sub-sector
A	Section 1	p.9	(a:d)
B	Section 1	p.9	(9:j)
C	Section 3	p.13	(16:f & g)
D	Section 4	p.22	(16: a & b)
E	Section 5	p.25	(30: a, b & c)
F	Section 5	p.28	(42)
G	Section 6	p.32	(50)
H	Section 7	p.36	74.75:a, b, c, d, & e)
I	Section 8	9.39	82, a & b)

However, all the sections of the 3rd edition of the 1998 NPE pose a great challenge to the trained counsellors in the schools. This is because counselling is for every individual in the school, be it teacher or student, parents and adults to bridge the gap of deficiencies as identified in the grammar school in the past.

The objective of the secondary education for instance, as thus stated in the NPE 1998 is to include:

- a. Preparation for useful living within the society; and preparation for higher education.
- b. To develop the individual student in order to meet the above stated objectives.

There are a lot more but to narrow our consideration down to the individual. The philosophy of Nigerian education is based on the development of the individual into an effective citizen and the provision of equal opportunities for all citizens of the nation at the basic, secondary and tertiary levels both inside and outside the formal school system.

The welfare of and concern for the individual is entrenched in our constitution and stated as:

- a. a free and democratic society;
- b. a just and egalitarian society;
- c. a united, strong and self-reliant nation
- d. a great and dynamic economy and

- e. a land full of bright opportunities for all citizens
These are lofty goals of Nigerian education but could sometimes be down to earth as:
 - a. Development of the individual into a morally sound, patriotic and effective citizens;
 - b. Total integration of the individual into the immediate community, the Nigerian society and the world (Ore, 2016).

Guidance and Counselling Provisions of the NPE

Nigerian Government in recognition of the importance of counselling to her educational system includes guidance in the policy document of the national policy on education (NPE,1981). Paragraph 83 (11) of the policy document stated expressly that:

In view of the apparent ignorance of many young people about career prospects and in views of personality maladjustment among school children, career officers and counsellors will be appointed in post-primary institutions. Since qualified personnel will continue to make provisions for the training of interested teachers in guidance and counselling. Guidance and counselling will also feature in teacher education programmes (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1981).

The above statement shows government awareness of the role of school counsellors and guidance and counselling in the school system and also the growing need for guidance services hence its inclusion in the policy document. It shows awareness of the problems of the younger generation but not however well informed about the scope, potential and objectives of what counselling entails.

The introduction of the new NPE in 1977 with its major revision in 1981, had among its features, the information of a new educational focus for the primary and secondary levels of education,(the 6-3-3-4 educational system)also influenced the emergence of guidance and counselling in Nigeria. It was a major breakaway from the existing educational policy that was introduced to the nation by the British Colonial master at independence.

Under the previous arrangement, secondary school students were expected to spend five years in the secondary school. Also, the curriculum tended to emphasize much of liberal education. But the new policy extended the number of liberal education. But the new policy extended the number of years in the secondary school from five years to six years. The policy also divided the secondary education into two levels – junior secondary (three years) and the senior secondary (another three years). Guidance counsellors thus have major roles to play in the ongoing 6-3-3-4 education system. This therefore led to the establishment of guidance and counselling units in all the state ministries of education and also in the universities.

Idowu (2004), reported that the Counselling Association of Nigeria (CASSON) through a sub -committee set up at the 1988 annual conference at Maiduguri did an appraisal of the NPE with a view of ascertaining the relevance of guidance and counselling in the educational system. The subcommittee observed that guidance and counselling deserved more than the little prominence given to it in the policy. A number of areas were identified as having bases for the acknowledgement of guidance and counselling. Idowu (2004), listed 17 such areas, for example,

section 1 number 7: (4), provides that educational activities be centred on the learner for maximum self development and fulfillment. Also section 1, number 7 (10), states that:

At any stage of the educational process after primary education, an individual will be able to choose between continuing his full-time studies, combining work with study, or embarking on full-time employment without excluding the prospect of resuming studies later (FRN, 1981).

Idowu (2004), reported that it was the reasoning of the subcommittee that if guidance and counselling covers the scope of all individuals in the gamut of the educational system from preprimary to the tertiary levels, both inside and outside the formal school setting, then it is a major component of education deserving of a whole section of its own.

School Counsellor Perspectives of the National Policy of Education

Every school has an educational aim and objective that lies on the purpose of special programmes for their students like school counselling. Edmonds in Schmidt (1999), said that a fundamental belief of effective school is that “all children can learn”. This is illustrative of the concept and purpose of education as preparation for life. An effective school system requires a climate that gives every learner equal opportunity to succeed academically. Schmidt (1999), asserts that school counselling assists students in becoming “able” learners, they support parents in their supervising and nurturing roles, and they help teachers to provide effective instruction and create healthy classroom climates for all students. This hypothesis for the role and purpose of school counsellors summarized a counsellor services as one that ensure an opportunity for all students to learn and develop to their fullest potentials.

Meeks in Jiya (online), observed that if the purpose of counselling is to facilitate development, then the counselling process must be part of the educational process from the pre-primary to the tertiary level. Children and adolescents in contemporary times face challenges that will continue to evolve in complexity and importance for generations to come. For this reason, schools and other institutions need to address the total development of all children. Educational goals cannot be separated from personal, social, physical and other developmental process. School counsellor’s roles thus are and will remain essential to the total education of the youths.

Contrary to some of the prevailing educational practices, educational development is not the sole responsibility of the classroom teacher. The totality of the educational success is guaranteed when teachers receive assistance from the school counsellor who provides direct services to the students, offer support to parents and guardians, and form collaborative relationships with teachers and other school personnel. Through this effort, student’s progress will be adequately assured and monitored. This will give the counsellors room to identify and address students’ learning as a main goal and purpose of comprehensive school counselling programmes.

Presently, guidance counsellors are largely perceived as “support personnel. This view implies that guidance counsellors provide ancillary services to the instruction offered by teachers and the administration required of head teachers and school principals. This view of the role of the school counsellor as “supportive” rather than essential often leaves the expert prescriptions

and reflective professional recommendations of the counsellor at the personal discretion of teachers and school administrators. For example, there is the widespread un-counselling practice where pupils or students who owing to gross academic under achievement are informed about their withdrawal from school through publication on the notice boards or assembly announcements without any attempt to place such learners in a more appropriate learning environment or follow-up strategy.

However, it is generally acknowledged that values claimed in all contents of education are attainable if there is a proper match between policy provision and implementation strategies and actions (Ivowi, 2000). Sofolahan (2000), observed that school administrators did not receive adequate orientation so as to appreciate the requirements of the policy in terms of philosophy, curriculum, counselling, continuous assessment and those other parameters that were new and designed to ensure effective and efficient implementation.

Recommendation and conclusion

If the NPE is to touch all through education, the school counsellor should be made a vehicle for the propagation. Guidance and counselling should be given its rightful place in the school system. For guidance counsellor to play its role in all that education is meant to accomplish there should be the need for more elaborate policy prescriptions in the following areas:

- a. Guidance and counselling should be made a major component of all levels of the educational system
- b. Professional guidance counsellors should be accorded the authority commensurate with their orientation and role.
- c. Government should encourage the training of interested teachers as professional guidance counsellors.
- d. There should be learning environment that should reflect the commitment to the engendering of equal educational opportunities through elaborate training opportunities to make for aptitudinal variety and diversity. It should be noted that the resourcefulness of guidance and counselling is being compromised and undermined through the absence of the organs responsible to the enforcement of the telegraphic policy prescriptions that exist. This should seriously be addressed to avert the enormous waste that is evidence in our schools present.

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