

Problems Facing Professionals Counselors in Public Secondary Schools in Nigeria and Way Forward

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Abstract: The roles of professional counselors in the development education cannot be underestimated especially in the public secondary schools. Counselors are employed to provide quality guidance and counseling services in schools. The assignment and responsibilities of counselors required a lot of human and materials resources to be able for them to discharge their functions. It is unfortunate that many counselors cannot effectively deliver their functions due to some challenges facing them. This paper intends to discuss the challenges facing counselors in public secondary schools in Nigeria. To do this, physical and online libraries were consulted for data. Both primary and secondary data were used to provide empirical support to the various points raised in the presentation. The data were sorted from print and online publication. The paper revealed that attending to large number of Students, inadequate infrastructural facilities, poor training and retraining, inadequate funding of guidance and counseling units, poor motivation, insecurity, lack of awareness of counselor' responsibilities and lack of enough counselling period are the challenges facing counselors in public secondary schools in Nigeria. To address these challenges, the papers recommended that; more allocation should be given to the secondary schools and more funds should be allocated to the administration of guidance and counseling programme, more professional counselors should be employed and deployed to public secondary schools to reduce the high students-counselors ratio and government should ensure counseling offices and rooms are well equip and furnished with needed counseling facilities etc.

Keywords: Counseling, Counselor, Guidance, public, Problems, Secondary

1.0. Introduction

Public secondary schools are educational institutions owned by the government. Secondary school education is an organized educational system given to students from basic education. Secondary school education is a post-basic education meant to prepare the students for higher education. The broad goals of Secondary Education according to the National Policy on Education (2004) include, the preparation of the individual for: Useful living within the society and higher education. In specific terms, the objectives are to: provide all primary school leavers with the opportunity for education of a higher level, irrespective of sex, social status, religion or ethnic background; Offer diversified curriculum to cater for the differences in talents, opportunities and future roles; Provide trained manpower in the applied science, technology and commerce at sub-professional grades; Develop and promote Nigerian languages, art and culture in the context of world cultural heritage; Inspire its students with a desire for self improvement and achievement of excellence; Foster national unity with an emphasis on the common ties that unite us in our diversity; Raise a generation of people who can think for themselves, respect the view and feelings of others, respect the dignity of labour, appreciate those values specified under our broad national goals and live as good citizens; and Provide technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, industrial, commercial and economic development.

Secondary schools offer a variety of academic and educational service programme. Among the educational service programme is the guidance and counseling programme. This programme is designed to provide a career and vocational, social and academic services for students. Mikaye, (2012) quoted UNESCO module on guidance and counselling (2000a) which observed that Guidance is a programme of services to individuals based on their needs and the influence of environmental factors. Guidance and counselling is a professional field which has a broad range of activities, programmes and services geared toward assisting individuals to understand themselves, their problems, their school environment and their world and also to develop adequate capacity for making wise choices and decisions. There is agreement among experts that there are three major components of guidance and counselling. These are educational guidance, vocational guidance and personal social guidance (UNESCO module 2000a). Under these three major areas, there are several guidance and counselling services such as appraisal, information, placement, orientation, evaluation, referral, and follow-up (Mikaye, 2012; Denga 2001). Each of these major components of guidance and counselling along with their services address students' needs, challenges and problems. The goal of guidance and counselling services is to enable each learner in institutions of learning to derive optimal educational benefits so as to actualize his/her potentialities.

To realize the objective of the guidance and counseling programme in public secondary schools in Nigeria the various ministries of education in charge of secondary schools management employed professional guidance and counseling and deployed them to their place of primary assignment.

The implementation of guidance and counseling programme required a lot of other human and materials resources to be put in place. There is need for adequate offices and facilities, stationaries, ICT facilities, recording books and other counseling tools. It have been observed that many counselors working in public secondary schools in Nigeria are faced with many challenges. This paper intends to discuss the challenges facing counselors in Nigerian public secondary schools.

2.0 Concept of Counselors

There are many definition of a professional counselor given by different people. According to Brown and Joshua, (2011). A professional counsellor is one that is academically trained in the field of guidance and counselling in a recognized tertiary institution. Therefore, the educational counselling service of the counsellor takes care of all aspects of educational matters as applicable to schools. Mikaye, (2012) defined Counsellor as a Professional teacher who is also a trained counsellor, who carries out the counselling processes in a school setting. Allaint (2020) submitted that the biggest beneficial effect of a well-trained and effective school counselor is in the way they help prepare students for academic, career, and social challenges through relating their school success with the potential success of their future lives. They should help motivate students to learn and explore the world around them to help figure out what they want to do with their lives, to encourage their students to have these types of conversations with their parents and peers, as well as being a sympathetic ear for the same students to come to when necessary—and this is nothing to say of their ability to facilitate more intimate or group counselling sessions as well. School counselors also provide support to teachers by serving an important part of the complete team that addresses the educational goals and needs of their students. Mikaye, (2012) opines that each of these major components of guidance and counselling along with their services address students' needs, challenges and problems. The goal of guidance and counselling services is to enable each learner in institutions of learning to derive optimal educational benefits so as to actualize his/her potentialities. Mikaye, (2012) cited Ayieko who (1988) submits guidance and counselling plays a pivotal role in students' behaviour management and correction in schools. Counselling can be used both as a curative measuring in addressing school discipline and to avert and/ or correct indiscipline among students. Guidance and counselling may be provided holistically in secondary schools.

The Essential Guidance Services of Counselor in Secondary Schools include the following as captioned by Busari (2012);

Appraisal Service: Involves the use of psychometric instruments to gather data on individuals to enable both the counsellor and the individuals concerned to understand themselves. Using the appropriate appraisal procedure using the test or non-test techniques, the individual can be opened-up to him. He is thus in a better position to understand his strengths and weaknesses, and consequently can make more realistic and effective choices

Placement Service: Refers to assistance given to an individual to make adjustment to the next stage of life development (Olayinka, 2012). In secondary school, student's placement may mean secondary adjustment in further education or adjustment in a job after secondary education. Placement therefore refers to the next steps, either in educational pursuit or in pursuit of Improving Guidance and Counseling Services for Effective Service Delivery in Nigerian Secondary Schools: Implications for stakeholders in education in vocational pursuit. Individuals need to be placed in educational or vocational field that relate to their interests, abilities and personalities.

Referral Service: This is the act of transferring an individual to another person or agency providing different kind of assistance. Referral is made for the purpose of specialized assistance. Many referrals occur simply because the problem is beyond the scope of the services provided.

Orientation Service: This is provided to help students adjust better in any new environment. Many new students feel lost socially and psychologically because they no longer enjoy the psychological support of parents, friend and former teachers. Orientation service helps students to adjust during his critical transition period. The students are introduced to the physical plants, administrative setup, rules and regulations governing student conduct use of school facilities, teaching staff, and how the school guidance programme can serve their needs.

Evaluation Service: The entire guidance programme in the school is evaluated in order to see how far the stated objectives and goals have been realized and whether the programme meets the developmental needs of the students. Unlike the other guidance services, evaluation is not a direct service to the student but to the entire guidance programme.

Counselling Service: Is a personalized dialogue or interview between the counsellor and counselee or client during which the client seeks expert assistance from the counsellor regarding the resolution of his problem. The Counselling service is personalized in the sense that usually, the client has a personal problem which requires privacy and confidentiality for discussion with a help expert. Such concerns may include emotional problems, family problems, sexual difficulties, marriage issues and other psychological problems (Hammed and Muraina, 2016). The Counselling service is the heart of guidance service and the most important central service of guidance.

Information Service: This aims at providing students with better knowledge of educational decisions. Such decision might include whether to go for further education or not, what institution to attend, what courses to offer, what elective to take, which social association to belong etc. The sources of information service include the local community, the national sources as well as source from outside the country.

Follow-up Service: This service is designed to assess the extent to which the guidance programme is meeting the needs for which it was Yusuf Suleiman, established. This service is concerned essentially with successes, failures, problems and feedbacks from those who have benefited from the programme. The ultimate goal of follow-up and evaluation is to improve the programme or make those adjustments that have been indicated by the beneficiaries of the programme as necessary. Individuals need to understand what is required in the situation they are placed. In order to determine the effectiveness of planning and placement, there is need to find out how the individuals are developing in their own place of work, and school, how they are

adjusting into their new environment. Follow-up service helps the staff to better understand and improve their curriculum and methods.

Allaint (2020) observed that a counselor should also always be there to offer advice to students at crucial turning points in their lives. Counselors working in elementary, middle, or high schools, ought to be there for students who are going through a difficult time or just need advice and support. A few words from a helpful counselor can profoundly impact a student's life by improving their outlook on school, family, and the future, and this, along with the responsibilities outlined above, form the key tenets of what the role of a modern school counselor is.

They can help plan classroom and group activities that meet the students' needs. Counselors gather and share resources with teachers to help the staff develop their skills in classroom management and teaching effectiveness. They also observe students in the classroom or playground and provide teachers assistance with their roles as guides (Allaint 2020). School counselors are an integral part of school administration. They ensure that the school counseling program and academic mission are in line and promote student success. Counselors also develop a system to manage the program and help the administration use counselors effectively to augment student development and learning. Additionally, they provide useful data from the program for funding and grant application purposes.

3.0 Problems facing Counselors in Public Secondary schools in Nigeria

Professional counselors working in various public secondary schools in Nigeria are faced with many challenges. These challenges including; attending to large number of Students, inadequate infrastructural facilities, poor training and retraining, inadequate funding of guidance and counseling units, inadequate ICT facilities, poor motivation, insecurity, lack of awareness of counselor' responsibilities and lack of enough counselling period.

3.1 Attending to large number of Students

Attending to large number of students above the stated counselor-students ratio is a major problem facing professional counselors in the Nigerian public secondary schools. Genesse (2006) and Umoh (2008) pointed out the ratio, as at 1980 was 1:800. The situation could be worse. This is because the limited members of trained counsellors are moving out of school settings into non-school settings. A typical school with a population of 1,000 students is expected to have four counsellors; now such a school either has none or at best only one. This poor counsellor-student ratio does not encourage the growth of guidance counselling in such schools. However, special schools such as the Federal Government Colleges, „Military“ Secondary Schools, University based Secondary Schools as well as standard/elitist private schools have adequate number of guidance counsellors. APGA recommended that there should be a ratio of 1 to 250 (counsellors-students/clients) but counselors are handling their and four students in some public secondary schools. There is inadequate guidance and counselling teachers in most of the public secondary school in Nigeria. Lack of training physical facilities and resources and inadequacy of funds are challenges which seem to derail the innovative effects of counsellors. Also, in Kenya, Okola (2005) carried out a study on the factors hindering effective provision of educational counselling services in Trans-Nzoia District and their effects on the effective provision of guidance and counselling services in secondary schools in the District. The study revealed that: Kenyan schools have very few reference resources for guidance and counselling; trained personnel in this area are few or not available at all in various schools; most schools do not have sufficient funds to carry out the programme effectively and some teachers and head teachers avoid the responsibility of running such a programme.

3.2 Inadequate Infrastructural Facilities

Ogunode & Owobamigbe (2021), submitted that School Infrastructural facilities refer to social capital within the school environment. They include school buildings/complexes such as classrooms, tables, exam hall, chairs, auditoria, desks, staff offices, seminar/conference/board rooms, laboratories, workshops, studios, farms, gymnasias, central libraries,

specialized/professional libraries, faculty libraries, departmental libraries, etc., Institute/centers' specialized facilities e.g. ICT infrastructure, special laboratories, conference facilities, etc., and Boards e.g. interactive, magnetic, screen and chalk, etc., ICT that is computer laboratories and services, network connectivity, multi-media system, public address system, slide, and video projectors, and Ergonomics furnishing in laboratories, libraries, and lecture rooms/ theaters, moot courts, and studios, etc. They went further and listed the importance of infrastructural facilities in educational institutions include: it aids effective delivery of administrative functions in schools; it makes the delivery of services fast and reliable; it enables teachers to deliver lessons fast; infrastructural facilities provide a conducive working environment for both teachers and students; infrastructural facilities enable learners to learn at ease and learn well; infrastructural facilities enable the teachers to teach well, prepare their lessons, and deliver them online (ICT). It is unfortunate that many counselors do not have adequate infrastructural facilities to support their works (Ogunode & Owobamigbe 2021). Information communication technologies are vital tools for counselors in this 21st century. Many counselors do not have ICT facilities in their offices and counseling rooms. Brown (undated) noted that challenges facing counsellors range from poor Information Communication Technology (ICT) compliance of Counsellors, lack of appraisal tools for counselling; poor physical facilities for counselling; inadequate communication by counsellors with teachers, administrators, students and parents; high ratio of students to counsellors, and counsellors' lack of power to influence change in the school; lack of sufficient funding for guidance activities; lack of time allotment for counselling; free choice versus national manpower need and what exact roles counsellors should play in schools as counsellors and reasons for their existence in the school settings; the challenges of sex inequality and occupational counselling in Nigeria; counselling and tradition. Suleiman, Olanrenwaju, & Suleiman, (2019), listed some factors responsible for shortage of facilities in schools to include explosion of students' population and inadequate number of classrooms, problem of space or office accommodation is common in the typical secondary school. This is particularly so in the urban centers (where counsellors may be found). This results into a situation in which there is hardly any spare room that can be released for counselling as counsellor's office". Guidance may be given anywhere but counselling needs privacy if it is to be effective (Adeyemo, 2014). One may see a counsellor interacting with a client in one corner of the staff room, under a tree or a place seemingly away from people but such areas are never distraction free. The best that occurs in schools without a counselling office is guidance or educational/vocational counselling, not socio-personal counselling.

3.3 Poor Training and Retraining

Counselors in most public secondary schools in Nigeria are not exposed to constant training and retraining programme to improve their counseling skills and knowledge. The inability of many counselor not to receive regular training is affecting their job performance. Mikaye, (2012) opines that lack of training of counsellors in gender analysis may lead many providers of guidance to render services and/or organize activities that may continue to maintain and enforce the already existing stereotype. Counselling skills are learned over time and should be practiced by a professional teacher-counsellor as much as possible. Counselling is a purposeful process which leads client to move understandings of themselves and other; the teacher – counsellor should therefore be conversant with the listening skill. Counselling is a process and theory based.

3.4 Inadequate Funding of Guidance and Counseling Units

The funding budgeted for the administration of counseling programme in public secondary schools in Nigeria is inadequate and is affecting the delivery of guidance and counseling services. Counselors cannot procure counseling materials for office use due to poor funding. The counseling units depends on the allocation the schools receives from the government to run all other sub-programme of the school. Ogunode (2021), submitted that inadequate funding is a major problem facing the administration of public secondary schools in Nigeria and this shortage is linked to the poor implementation of UNESCO 26% recommendation for developing countries. Ogunode & Owobamigbe (2021), acknowledged that inadequate funding is a major

problem hindering effective service delivering of Guidance and Counseling services in Nigerian public primary schools. The funding allocated for the administration of Guidance and counseling services in Nigerian public primary schools is not adequate. Brown (undated) observed that the challenges that have restricted their effective functioning include insufficient funds for programmes, students' inability to open up during counselling, un-conducive counselling environment, lack of psychological tests for appraisal and placement purposes, problem encountered in allotting time for counselling activities, lukewarm attitudes of parents, teachers and students among others.

3.5 Poor Motivation

Poor motivation is another problem counsellors are facing in the Nigerian public schools. Counselors are poorly motivated. Their salaries and allowances are not paid on time. Some counselors working in state schools are been owed five to six months salaries. The state of the work condition of professional counselors is not encouraging and this is responsible for why many professional counselors are moving to other sectors to work there. Ola (2014) observed that counselors in Nigerian educational institutions are poorly motivated.

3.6 Insecurity

Insecurity is another major problem facing counselors working in public schools across the country. Many counselors, teachers and school administrators have been kidnapped and killed. Ogunode (2021) observes that both school administrators, teachers, non-teaching staff and students are in the state of fear. Insecurity challenge is another major problem facing the secondary schools in Nigeria especially in the Northern part of the country. Insecurity have prevent effective administration of secondary school programme in the country. Many school administrators, teachers, non-teaching staff and students have been killed. Some school administrators, teachers, non-teaching staff and students have been kidnapped and many infrastructural facilities destroyed by Boko Haram members. Secondary school programme have been disrupted due to closing down of school in Northeast Nigeria. World Bank (2018) disclosed that since 2009, Boko Haram has been in conflict with the Nigerian government, affecting nearly 15 million people. So, what has been the impact of Boko Haram on education in Nigeria, particularly in the northern region? The quick answer is: quite significant. Boko Haram has targeted the Nigerian education system, assaulting schools, students, and teachers in Northeast Nigeria and disrupting access to education and social services, especially for young people. Teachers have been threatened, and in some cases, killed. Schools have been damaged and destroyed, and often transformed into shelters for internally displaced people (IDP). Schools that remain in operation across Borno, Adamawa and Yobe states are overcrowded and unable to meet the needs of the host population and the IDP. The cable (2018) reported that the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) says Boko Haram has killed 2,300 teachers in Nigeria's northeast since the start of the insurgency in 2009. In the 2018 UNESCO global education monitoring report (GEM), the UN agency said 19,000 teachers have been displaced in the region, affecting access to education. "In north-eastern Nigeria, as of late 2017, there were 1.6 million IDPs, including an estimated 700,000 school-age children, as a result of violent attacks on civilians by Boko Haram, which began in 2009," the report read in part. "Boko Haram has destroyed nearly 1,000 schools and displaced 19,000 teachers. Reports indicated it had killed almost 2,300 teachers.

3.7 Lack of Acceptance

Many counselors in Nigerian public secondary schools are not accepted and given proper recognition. School administrators and managers sees counselors are non-important profession and their services are less required. Based on this perception, they look down on counselors posted to work under them and give them other assignment to do. Abraham and Brown (2011), observes that when counsellors are posted to schools, principals assign duties to them according to their schools need. Most of the times, the counsellors posted to some schools may be asked to play the role of vice principals, to teach as full time teachers, to act as guidance counsellors, to perform the role of career master and mistress, to act as school clerk or cashier among others.

Brown (undated), Watanable and Herr (2006), Daniel (2009), Udom (2010) and Joseph (2012) in their researches discovered that, professional counsellors are faced with serious challenges like lack of acceptance, lack of instruments for psychological tests for appraisal and placement purposes, lack of vocational information, economic, cultural and language barriers. Brown (undated) did a study and discovered that counsellors are faced with issues and challenges which include un-identification of exact role to play, lack of cooperation from schools personnel, expectation of divulging of clients secret, rivalry from the school head, confusion as to whether the school counsellor is a technician or is a professional among others.

3.9 Poor Awareness of the Programme of Counsellors

Another problem facing counselors in the educational institutions is that many school administrators, teachers and students are not aware of their real functions and roles in the school system and this is affecting how they see counselors in the school. Joseph (2012) submitted that even in the school setting, effective guidance programme has not emerged in a large scale. This possibly may be due to some challenges facing guidance and counselling which is a dilemma to the educational sector, which are still not solved. Brown (2016) observes that the students that the counsellors are supposed to guide and assist in their educational, vocational and personal social development are not aware of counsellor's existence and even when they realize that, they are not sure of the exact role the counsellor plays. However, such awareness is still limited to the school setting.

3.10 Lack of enough Counselling Periods

Counselors in public secondary schools are not given enough periods to meet with the students and this is affecting their works. Ogunode & Owobamigbe (2021), submitted that lack of Counselling period allocated for the implementation of Guidance and Counseling programme in Nigerian public primary schools is preventing effective Guidance and Counseling services in the primary schools. Adebukola, (2015), opined that in most of the primary schools in Nigeria, there is no specific time allocated for guidance and counselling services apart from the break during which the pupils ought to eat and relax. This time is too short for counsellors to attend to pupils, let alone for effective counselling to take place.

4.0 Way Forward

To address these challenges facing counselors in the Nigerian public secondary schools, the following were recommended:

1. More allocation should be given to the secondary schools and more funds should be allocated to the administration of guidance and counseling programme. This will enable schools administrators and counselors implement counseling services in their respective schools.
2. More professional counselors should be employed and deploy to public secondary schools to reduce the high students-counselors ratio. This will help counselors provide quality counseling services to the students.
3. The government should ensure counseling offices and rooms are well equip and furnished with needed counseling facilities. This will help counselors to provide quality counseling services.
4. The salaries of counselors should be increase and more allows be given to them. This will motivated professional counselors to remain in the school system.
5. The government should ensure that counselors are constantly been trained and retrained. This will help the counselors to improve their counseling skills and knowledge.
6. Counselors in educational institutions should organize seminar and orientation programme for students and teachers to enlighten them on the roles and functions of the guidance and counseling and the unique roles of counselors in the educational system.
7. The government should provide adequate security in public secondary schools across the country. This will help to gurantee.

8. The school administrators should provide more lesson period for guidance and counseling teachers to used and discuss with the students. This will help to improve the services delivering of guidance and counseling in primary schools

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper discussed the challenges facing professional counselors in the public secondary schools in Nigeria. The paper identified attending to large number of Students, inadequate infrastructural facilities, poor training and retraining, inadequate funding of guidance and counseling units, Inadequate ICT facilities, poor motivation, insecurity, lack of awareness of counselor' responsibilities and lack of counselling period as the challenges facing counselors in public secondary schools in Nigeria. To solve these challenges, the papers recommended that; more allocation should be given to the secondary schools and more funds should be allocated to the administration of guidance and counseling programme, more professional counselors should be employed and deployed to public secondary schools to reduce the high students-counselors ratio and government should ensure counseling offices and rooms are well equip and furnished with needed counseling facilities, salaries of counselors should be increase and more allows be given to them, government should ensure that counselors are constantly been trained and retrained, Counselors in educational institutions should organize seminar and orientation programme for students and teachers to enlighten them on the roles and functions of the guidance and counseling and the unique roles of counselors in the educational system and government should provide adequate security in public secondary schools across the country.

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