

THE ROLE OF COUNSELLING IN THE QUEST FOR SCHOOL EFFECTIVENESS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

School effectiveness is guaranteed when the essential elements of a learning context are provided. One of such elements is counselling as an educational service. The paper highlighted the role of counselling in achieving school effectiveness in terms of social activism to address the challenges of the poor who attend school facilities that are severally deprived, another aspect of the discourse is the management of individual differences in a context of a functional student support services such as the counselling unit, school clinic, special education facilities/personnel etc. In addition the paper addressed the need for achievement advocacy to minimize test abuses that takes the form of test bias that assumes relatively equal educational treatment when in reality it is different schools for different children based on the capacity of parents to pay. Even public schools are of different qualities and this should be of concern where Government has committed itself to egalitarian ideals. Recommendations were proffered focusing on the need to reposition schools to reflect the egalitarian commitment of government to equal educational opportunity and free compulsory basic education.

Introduction

In contemporary social systems, schools are indispensable. The purpose of schools is delivery of education which prepares citizens for life. Ordinarily good school conditions produce educated citizens. The relationship between schooling and education is simply that of process/context and product. Therefore effective schooling will guarantee quality human capital which will produce a society that is

working. The Nigeria school condition has been amply provided for in the National Policy on education. For example, the policy states that the goals of education in Nigeria are the:

- » The development of the individual into a morally sound, patriotic and effective citizen.
- » Total integration of the individual into the immediate community, the Nigerian society and the world
- » Provision of equal access to qualitative educational opportunities for all citizens at all levels of education, within and outside the formal school system (FRN, 2014).

If you take any of the items listed above as basis for ascertaining school effectiveness against the backdrop of contemporary Nigerian challenges of unemployment, insecurity, inter-ethnic and inter-religions strife, political instability etc which are all at the behest of elites, then one need not look far to realise that our schools leave much to be desired. Note that the challenge is not only in the nature of the crisis but also obvious in the approach of Government functionaries in managing the crisis. For example, if you consider the genesis of Boko Haram vis-à-vis the ongoing agitations of the Islamic Movement in Nigeria, you wonder if any lesson has been learnt. Is three years not enough to charge and prosecute those incarcerated particularly for those who have court rulings demanding their release?

Anikweze (2011) reported that most of the products of Nigerian school system as shown by their level of performance in jobs and by their character are below expectation. He said that stakeholders have complained about poor communication skills by University graduates and lack of practical skills to qualify them for existing job vacancies. Worst of all is the inability to create jobs despite the contemporary sing-song of entrepreneurship at post-primary and post-secondary schools. This is particularly pathetic when you take into consideration our economic production challenges of primary goods (Agriculture and Minerals) and imports of goods which we have the potentials to produce locally.

In terms of character, schools as communities have not shown appreciable success in engendering good learner conduct. There are reports of examination misconducts, cultism, stealing, sexual immorality; indecent dressing and financial crimes Ikeotuonye (2011) said that

Today, when one talks of quality and functionality of education in Nigeria, he is talking of illiterate primary school leavers, semi-illiterate and disoriented secondary school leavers, unemployable university graduates, inefficient and disoriented teachers at all three levels of education and poor educational infrastructure.....

The Scenario above was reported in 2011, it is worst now (i.e. 2021) because nothing has been done to significantly improve the system.

The Nigeria media space is dominated by reports of kidnapping, arm robbery, political violence/thuggery, and love of money that is not linked to hard work. Education sector analysis reveals that academic achievement of students at Junior Secondary School level (JSS) and Senior Secondary School Level (SSS) were generally poor. For example, learning achievement of primary school pupils in the test of literacy and numeracy between 1996 and 2003 has never exceeded 35% (FRN, 2004; Anikweze 2011). Mean academic performance of Nigeria students at post secondary school level is far below expectation. Attempt by National University Commission (NUC to raise pass mark to 45% by abolishing pass degree class has been reversed. In sum, effective schooling, which produces individuals with capacity to function in proportion to particular competency levels of our schools, has become subject of concern.

The purpose of this paper is to justify enhanced formalization of counselling services as panacea to school ineffectiveness. Unlike the present form of Guidance and Counselling as contained in the national policy on education which is characterized by a list of Guidance essentials that have no documented sustainable resource guarantees for effective implementation. For the records, the policy states: *Government shall continue to make provision for the training of teachers in Guidance and*

Counselling; establish and equip: counselling clinics, career centres; and information

centres. *Proprietors of schools shall provide Guidance Counsellors for their institutions*

(FRN, 2014:59).

Concept of school effectiveness

School is an institution designed for learning for life. There are different levels of schooling but for particular levels, schools have common goals to pursue, common curriculum to implement and common rules and norms to observe. Key agents in school operation include teachers, administrators (such as the Headmaster or principal), parents, counsellors, medical team etc. Ideally Schools are supposed to be designed to provide for individual differences particularly for climes where funding and superintending authorities (e.g. Government for public schools) have committed itself through documents such as the National policy on education, and the Universal Basic Education Act to equal education opportunity claims. Where you have differences in funding, quality of staff and public expectations; then school effectiveness as a concept becomes problematic. Sun,

Creamers and De Jong (2007) said that school effectiveness have two distinct aims: to identify factors that are characteristic of effective schools and secondly to identify differences between education outcomes in the schools. In Nigeria use of outcome measures has been the vogue, but Sun et al (2007) cautioned that this is open to debate in many areas of research. Learner education outcomes focus on test or examination results obtained during formal assessment.

Reynolds and Reid (1985) are of the view that schools are effective if their students/pupils perform at a higher level than those of average schools and ineffective schools if their student/pupils perform at a lower level than those of average schools. Doyle and Witcher, Downer in Kalra (2008) found in their studies that factors contributing to effective schooling include Principal (School Head) spending significant portion of the day on instruction related activities, low student – teacher ratio, departmental support to the school, consistent rules, school culture where expectations from students are higher and goals before the school are also higher.

For the purpose of this paper school effectiveness implies the capacity of schools to achieve satisfactory learning outcomes within the limit or far above the limit of resources provided. One of the implications of this definition is that poorly funded schools cannot be accused of not providing learner education outcomes that are comparable to the better funded schools. For example, many public schools have limited resources and consequently it is extremely difficult for many schools to maximize its effectiveness. This is because schools work within multiple environmental constraints and time frames (Hall 1987). Macbeath and Mortimore (2001) posits that school effectiveness came into being as a result of inequalities in society which led to a move towards education for all. In fulfilling the aspiration of education for all, new challenges surface requiring schools to continually revise and improve their performance.

Counselling and School Effectiveness

Counselling is the skilled and principled use of a relationship to facilitate self-knowledge, emotional acceptance and growth, and the optimal development of personal resources. The overall aim is to provide an opportunity to work towards living more satisfyingly and resourcefully (British Association for Counselling, 1991 & Hornby, Hall and Hall, 2003). Counselling is a professional relationship that empowers diverse individuals, families and groups to accomplish mental health, wellness, education and career goals (Shannon, 2016). Counselling is fundamentally based on conversation, on the capacity of people to 'talk things through' and to generate new possibilities for action through dialogue (McLeod, 2009). As an area of applied psychology, counseling believes that human

development is about realizing one's potentials based on the interaction of heredity and environment. That human beings are always in the process of becoming but that there could be blocks or obstacles. Therefore counseling exists as an enabler. Edmonds (1979) argued that a fundamental belief of effective schools is that "all children can learn". The challenge is to see this belief become reality. Schmidt (1999) said that counselors assist students with developmental task, assist parents and teachers who are challenged by countless needs of children and adolescents in today's society. These counselors offer services to students, parents and teachers so that students have equal opportunity to reach their educational goals, choose appropriate career direction, and develop as full functioning members of a democratic society.

Some of the pragmatic ways counselling can contribute to school effectiveness in Nigeria include the following"

One, the Nigeria education practice is affected by widespread poverty. Different schools for different children based on the socio-economic status of parents. All initiatives at local and national levels to make schools effective may be wasted unless we pay attention to growing economic disparities in the country. Nigeria is being labeled as one of the poorest countries of the world. If this trend continues, economic inequality will become a wedge that clearly divide students into *haves* and *have not* (Schmidt, 1999). If this economic wedge continues to separate and distinguish students, the counselor's role and responsibility will now include a posture of social activism to seek assistance for the disadvantaged. Social net such as, scholarship and foundations will be needed to provide for the deficit in the school context of the poor population. This scholarship need to be accessible to the poor. Take the Federal Government scholarship scheme for example; the requirement for participation in selection exam is a CGPA of 3.50. Given the relationship between poverty and academic achievement, which is largely occasioned by impoverished school facilities for the poor, it follows that the scholarship will largely be accessed by the children of the middle and upper class, thereby reinforcing the gap between the rich and the poor. As Howe (1991) asserted that poverty is the parent of school failure, job failure, emotional imbalance and social rejection. Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas in Ivan (1979) observed that the only way to establish an institution is to finance it.

Secondly, counseling as an educational service can play a pivotal role in monitoring students' performance as well as providing assistance to students who struggle academically or who are at risk of failing test/examinations. On the 9th July 2019, the author visited two schools within Lapai environs to supervise students on counseling practicum and during an appraisal conference with student counselors, it was reported that the two schools have problem of academic underachievement. For

example, many of the secondary school students came to seek help on how to read. When the author asked the counselors in training to place the students based on their reading ability, the responses included "client in JSS 3 is supposed to be in primary four" "another client in SS2 is supposed to be primary four" . You found students in JSS 3 and SS1 who could not read the alphabets off-hand. This scenario shows poor monitoring and evaluation by teachers and school management. Take the continuous assessment which is one of the routines of school practice in Nigeria, One of the characteristics is that it must be guidance oriented, meaning it provides stimulus for remedial education and other appropriate interventions that should check learning deficits. Effective continuous assessment enhances school effectiveness that has basic features.

Another aspect of school life in which counsellors use their consulting skills is in advocating for healthy school climates (Schmidt, 1999). To help school realize the impact of environmental factors on students' learning, counsellors consult with administrators, teachers, parents and others to examine aspects of the school that enhance or detract from educational processes. Schools that intentionally create beneficial environments and counsellors who actively assess school processes, programmes and policies to assure healthy climates combine to develop effective educational opportunities for all students (Purkey and Schmidt, 1990, Purkey and Stanley, 1991 and 1997). In planning healthy school context, counsellors help administrators and teachers evaluate programmes that enhance learning and they determine whether these programmes accomplish what is intended. Sometimes schools create programmes to benefit all students, but in practice they may exclude rather than include students who need services. An example of this is the Parents Teachers Association (PTA) fees considered affordable for all learners, but you find students who are not able to pay and are sometimes sent out of classroom. Note that these learners may not only be poor economically, but that some of the parents lack needed awareness that should compel them invest in the education of their children. Consequently, you find these children missing lesson/classes for not paying PTA fees in a school context of universal, free, compulsory education. This practice compounds the learning deficit of the poor which often go unnoticed. It also adulterates equal education opportunity policy.

Student support service is another area of counselling intervention that can enhance school effectiveness. It is supposed to be a team work. The team usually includes school counsellor, a psychologist, a social worker, a nurse, an administrator and teachers. Special education teachers are usually represented (Schmidt, 1999). The main purpose of student support services is to follow cases of learners (Students/pupils) who are experiencing particular learning and behavioural difficulties. The team coordinates services and sees that each student receives

adequate attention to meet learner's needs. In view of the fact that counsellors are part of Nigeria school practice by virtue of the provision of the National Policy on Education (FRN 2014) in addition to favourable rising public perception of their role in schools, it is recommended that counsellors coordinate the support services. Counselling as platform for school achievement advocacy. Advocacy describes action and/or effort designed to improve the conditions of a group or alleviate injustice faced by individuals or groups (House and Martin, 1998). Erford (2007) said that to be outstanding advocate for all students, professional school counsellors must understand their own biases, recognize potential harm when dealing with culturally diverse students and parents, and be open to change in personal worldviews. This requires the development of multicultural competencies as basis for understanding social and political forces operating within particular collectivity/society. For example, JAMB put cut-off point of Public Universities at 160 and that of Private Universities at 150. If you take the scenario, where it is the children of parents who are economically well-off that attend the private schools, who also must have attended better funded pre-university education institutions, you realize that these policy merely lower the bar of requirements for children whose parents have the means to seek private university admission. This is happening in a society that is battling with crisis, largely occasioned by widening gap between the rich and the poor. Another example is the preponderance of national examinations (e.g. National Common Entrance Examination, Basic Education Certificate Examination, National Examination Council, West African Examination Council, JAMB etc.) in a school context of differences in school quality. All these will certainly continue to widen the gap between the rich and the poor except professionals provide good explanations and perspectives that expose the injustices behind these practices.

In conclusion, effective schooling is possible where appropriate philosophies, educational policy measures, and educational services such as counselling form the basis of school practices. All is not well with the Nigerian school system. Its ineffectiveness is obvious and poor funding coupled with nepotism in appointment remains the bane of attempts to revive it. The consequences are common place and it is likely to aggravate if we do not retrace our steps to good school practices. Such practices would include a school environment with relevant personnel in terms of variety and quality. One of such personnel is the school counsellor.

Recommendations

The following recommendations will certainly enhance school effectiveness.

The level of poverty in Nigeria will require a social net for addressing the economic deprivation of the poor. Professionals must work hard to create

awareness in the light of the lessons from theorist like Abraham Maslow's explanation of hierarchy of needs. If basic need of food and security is not met, teaching and learning becomes an exercise in futility.

Teachers should be motivated so that they can be accountable for their role in the education of students. Monitoring to ensure management of individual differences is key to schools effectiveness. Counselling can help teachers understand and appreciate this element.

Student support services should be included in the accreditation requirement of basic education and senior secondary schools. The practice of prior information to schools ahead of accreditation should be discouraged. Use of machineries during accreditation should attract sanctions. NUC database of staff of Universities in Nigeria should be used effectively to check this malpractice.

Achievement advocacy should be conceptually localized to minimize test bias/abuse against products of poorly equipped/funded schools particularly when the test is aptitudinal. This will reduce challenges associated with unrealised margin of learner aptitude. Use of appropriate test for baseline data for identification of learning deficits of newly admitted students at all levels of our schools should be encouraged.

Nigeria needs to reposition the teaching professional to attract quality manpower. For now, Faculties of Education in Nigerian Universities are not attracting students with high aptitude. Indeed, majority of the students you find in Faculties of Education do not usually choose to be there. This is obvious for any discerning observer. Most Private Universities are not offering Education courses because teaching career does not attract children of the economic class that patronises private Universities.

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