

Challenges Facing Counsellors in Nigerian Public Primary Schools and Way Forward

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ABSTRACT

This paper discussed the challenges facing Counsellors in Public Primary schools in Nigeria. The paper depends on primary and secondary data. The secondary data was sourced from print and online publication. The paper concludes that inadequate funding, lack of working tools, inadequate infrastructural facilities, insecurity problem, poor supervision, teaching of large classes, negatives attitude of students towards Counsellors, negative relationship between counselors and school administrators, poor motivation and poor capacity development of supervisors are the challenges facing Counsellors working in public primary schools in Nigeria. To address these challenges, the paper suggested the following: increase in the funding of guidance and counseling programme, provision of more working tools, provision of adequate infrastructural facilities, provision of adequate security in public primary schools, improvement of supervision of guidance and counseling programme, employment of more trained counsellors, increment in the salaries of Counselors and ensure constant training and retraining programme for counselors.

KEYWORDS: *Challenges, Counselling, Guidance, Counsellors, Public, Schools.*

1.0 Introduction

The National Policy on Education (2013) defined primary education as the education given to children aged 6-12 years. Primary school education is the foundation education system that exposes the children to the basic principle of human and materials resources. Primary school education is the education before secondary school education. Primary school education is the education that prepares the children for basic education. Nram (2005) sees primary education as the basic or introductory schooling that children received from 6years and continuing to 11years. The objectives of primary education are to: inculcate permanent literacy, numeracy and the ability to communicate effectively; lay a sound basis for scientific, critical and reflective thinking; promote patriotism, fairness, understanding and national unity; instill social, moral norms and values in the child; develop in the child the ability to adapt to the changing environment; and Provide opportunities for the child to develop life manipulative skills that will enable the child function effectively in the society within the limits of the child's capability (Ogunode, &Owobamigbe, 2021, NPE, 2013).

To realize the objective of the primary school education in Nigeria, the Nigerian government shall establish educational support services in all public primary schools across the country. According to National Policy on Education (2013), educational support services facilitate the implementation of

educational policy, the attainment of policy goals and the promotion of effectiveness of educational system. The goals of educational support services shall be to: develop, assess and improve educational programmes; enhance teaching and improve the competence of teachers; provide conducive environment for learning; make learning experiences more meaningful and realistic for children; make education more cost-effective; promote in-service education; enhance access to learning; develop and promote effective use of innovative materials in schools; and promote partnership with Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and International Development Partners (IDPs) to access resources (Ogunode, & Owobamigbe, 2021, NPE, 2013). To achieve these goals, the following services and facilities shall be provided:

Guidance and Counselling: Government shall continue to make provision for the training of teachers in Guidance and Counselling; establish and equip: Counseling Clinics, Career Resources and information centres and Proprietors of schools shall provide adequate number guidance counselors for their institutions (NPE, 2013).

Ogunode, & Owobamigbe, (2021) observed that Public primary schools in Nigerian are full of children with social problems that need the services of Counselors. Also, Adebukola (2015), submitted that primary school pupils face a lot of developmental problems which hinder their intellectual, physical, social, emotional, moral and vocational development. This is, because the basic stage of pupil is the first of all dimensions of development of the worth, dignity and maturity of the individuals. Most of what the individuals are facing today is as a result of what their foundation is laid upon at their preliminary stage of their life. Many primary schools are faced with indiscipline and poor performances, many people do not regard guidance and counselling as a critical issue in the development of the pupils (Ogunode, & Owobamigbe, 2021).

To solve tis social problems facing the pupil the government established the unit of guidance and counseling office in all public primary schools across the country. The government employed the services of a trained counsellors to head the counseling unit of the schools. However, most of these Counselors cannot carry out their responsibilities as designed due to many challenges. This paper intends to discuss the challenges facing Counselors in public primary schools in Nigeria.

2.0 Concept of Counsellor

School counselors are certified/licensed educators who improve student success for ALL students by implementing a comprehensive school counseling program. School counselors design and deliver school counseling programs that improve student outcomes. They lead, advocate and collaborate to promote equity and access for all students by connecting their school counseling program to the school's academic mission and school improvement plan. They uphold the ethical and professional standards of their professional body and promote the development of the school counseling program based on the following areas of the professional body National Model: define, deliver, manage and assess (ASCA, undated).

Neyland, Leslie, John, Jennifer, Kelly, & Nick (2018) observes that School guidance and counseling service prepare students to assume increasing responsibility for their decisions and grow in their ability to understand and accept the results of their choices. There are effective implementations of guidance and counseling in educational system of developed nations. The service of guidance and counseling at schools provide a good opportunity for students to cope with the demands of learning and personal development.

Iduwu, (undated) submitted that the counsellor is a helping professional who is trained in human behaviour. He interprets human behaviour in such a way that he will be able to function effectively in the world around him. The Guidance counsellor seeks to help individuals of all ages and sex in their bid to solve their problems. He is always out to treat individuals with dignity and respect. The

counsellor empathises with individuals and confidentiality in his watch-word. He keeps his counselees' secrets secret. He is a career educator, who sees to it that Individuals are properly guided in their choice of careers. Indeed, the counsellor is an adviser, a helper, a teacher, a parent, a confidant and a friend to the child.

Iduwu, (undated) observed that for anyone to be able to provide any meaningful counselling in the primary school should have the following characteristics.

- a) Empathy;
- b) Genuineness;
- c) Patient Understanding;
- d) Ability to maintain confidentiality;
- e) "Sound moral character; and
- f) Ability to maintain good appearance.

The duties of a professional Counsellors include;

- A) design individual student academic planning and goal setting
- b) planschool counseling classroom lessons based on student success standards
- c) planshort-term counseling to students
- d) carry out referrals for long-term support
- e) collaboration with families/teachers/ administrators/ community for student success
- f) advocacy for students at individual education plan meetings and other student-focused meetings
- e) data analysis to identify student issues, needs and challenges
- 8) acting as a systems change agent to improve equity and access, achievement and opportunities for all student(ASCA, undated).

Functions of a Professional Counsellors include

1. deliver developmentally appropriate activities and services directly to students or indirectly for students as a result of the school counselor's interaction with others.
2. use program focus and planning tools to guide the design and implementation of a school counseling program that gets results.
3. ensure equitable academic, career and social/emotional development opportunities for all students
4. work to maximize student success, promoting access and equity for all students. As vital members of the school leadership team, school counselors create a school culture of success for all (ASCA, undated).

Suleiman, Olanrenwaju, & Suleiman, (2019) and (Adeyemo, 2014) submitted that Guidance counselling is a noble profession whose importance in the educational system of Nigeria is becoming increasingly recognized by the country's educational planners and policy makers. Ideally a well-trained school counsellor should be available in each institution in the federation to deal with various aspects of students' problems and this presupposes the establishment of school guidance and counselling from the primary up to the tertiary levels while Suleiman, Olanrenwaju, & Suleiman, (2019) observed that the omission of vocational or career guidance and developmental guidance at the primary school level in Nigeria is not only incongruous but suggests some dangers, this called for

the Needs for Repositioning Guidance and Counselling in Education. Brown and Joshua, (2011) opines that Counselling services are the services rendered by the counsellor to an individual or group of persons in an organized institution or setting. 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 setting.

Iduwu, (undated) outlined some of the reasons why primary school children need counselling to include.

(a) An individual's ability, Interest, aptitude are better tapped at the initial stages of life. The practice whereby counselling is not done at the very crucial stages of life is anathema to the development of the child. It has to start at the primary school level.

(b) There is a need to provide special help for numerous primary school children. It is worth knowing that the Nigerian Prisons, and Mental Health hospitals are inhabited by individuals who could have profited from guidance and help in early life. They lead unproductive and unhappy lives because they were not properly guided from the beginning.

(c) There is need to stem the tide of maladaptive behaviours in the school system and in the general public. Many vagabonds, drug abusers, drug peddlers, bullies, hooligans and pimps could have been helped to live better and more useful lives if they have been exposed to counselling services at youth.

(d) There is need to hunt for gifted children in the society with a view to helping them develop their talents fully. This can only be done through counselling strategies.

(e) The present pressure of the society demands the help of counselling and the counsellors.

Many homes are now breeding grounds for social problems. There is need for a change for the better.

(f) The impoverishment of many homes demands the help of Guidance/Counsellors who should embark on outreach counselling.

(g) There is need to provide the child with a sound foundation for future, academic, psychological, and personal growth. The truth has to be recognised that life begins at birth and not at adolescence, in the secondary schools.

3.0 Challenges Facing Counsellors in Public Primary Schools in Nigeria

There are many challenges facing the Counsellors working in public primary schools in Nigeria. Some of these challenges include; inadequate funding, lack of working tools, inadequate infrastructural facilities, insecurity problem, poor supervision, teaching of large classes, negative attitude of students towards Counsellors, negative relationship between counsellors and school administrators, poor motivation and poor capacity development of counsellors.

3.1 Inadequate Funding

Funding is key for the implementation of guidance and counseling services in educational institutions. Adequate funding of guidance and counseling services in the educational institutions is the only means to the realization of guidance and counseling services objective and programme. Funds are needed for the procurement of human and materials resources for the smooth implementation of guidance and counseling services in schools. It is unfortunate that guidance and counseling programme is underfunded in public educational institutions in Nigeria. Guidance and Counseling Programme drives its funding from the school allocation which have been described by Ogunode (2020) as inadequate for internal administration of public schools. Departments or units of guidance and counseling in public schools gets a fraction of the school allocation which is very small

to implement the guidance and counseling programme. Many guidance and counselors do not access adequate funds to aid their service delivery. This submission agrees with the submission of Ogunode, &Owobamigbe, (2021) who concludes 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. Guiding and Counseling services drives it funding from the primary school annual budget which have been described by Ogunode (2020), as inadequate to successfully implement primary school programmes. Ogunode, &Owobamigbe, (2021) cited Ugwuoke (2020), observed that Guidance and counselling is not well funded today, the education enterprise has become a costly venture. Enough funds are not allocated to each school to run its various services. Where funds are available, very little is earmarked for counselling purposes. It seems the various levels of government (Federal, state and Local) do not want to stretch their budgets with extra demands from emerging unit such as guidance and counselling, yet it is known that effective counselling demands adequate funding to purchase items such as psychological tests, journals and various publications, play gadgets, cardboards and various felt pens as well as money to organize activities such as Orientation, Excursions, career clubs and Career Day/week and furnishing a counsellor's office.

3.2 Lack of Working Tools

Guidance and Counselling working materials are essential for counsellors. Counsellors needs the working tools to be effective in delivery of their services. Many public primary schools counselors do not have adequate working tools to carry out the functions. Ogunode, &Owobamigbe, (2021) submitted that lack of Guidance and Counseling materials is another problem preventing effective Guidance and Counseling services in many public primary schools in Nigeria. Many Guidance and Counseling teachers are not provided with working materials like records books, pens, charts, ICT facilities to discharge their responsibilities. The inability of the school head to provide the Guidance and Counseling teachers with these resources is affecting the effective delivering of guidance and counseling services in public primary schools.

3.3 Inadequate Infrastructural Facilities

Another major challenge facing counselors working in public primary schools across the country is the problem of inadequate infrastructural facilities. Infrastructural facilities refers to those materials resources that support effective delivery of services. They include offices, halls, classrooms, tables, chairs, ICT, electric, water, internet services etc. Many counselors do not have conducive office or room to attend to students. Some of the public school with offices, the offices are not well furnished and lack essential office equipment. The inability of these counselors to access conducive offices to discharge their responsibilities is affecting their productivity. Yirgalem (2013) submitted that most school guidance and counselors reported to suffer from the shortage of private counseling room as well as most school principals and other officials wanted the Guidance and Counseling program to focus on education related issues like study skills, discipline and late coming. With the absence of clear roles and responsibilities, most visited guidance and counseling officers in the secondary schools were expected to serve as unit leaders.

3.4 Insecurity Problem

Insecurity problem is the country is affecting the service delivery of counsellors working in public primary schools across the country especially in the Northern part of Nigeria. Due to continuous attacks on public educational institutions across the country the academic programme of school are disrupted. ALaebo, (undated) observed that Insurgency and security situations has forced many universities, polytechnics, colleges of education, secondary and primary schools to close down in

north-east region of Nigeria because the learning environment are no longer safe for learning. Aina (2012) posited that anywhere students were not able to attend schools regularly for fear of bomb explosion or kidnapping will not be able to interact socially and this will affect their learning. Many brilliant students who should have been an asset to the academic institutions had been killed by terrorist while many had suffered untold hardship in the hand of kidnappers which later affected them both emotionally and academically. Many Counselors and teachers have been killed and kidnapped in Nigeria. Cable (2019), 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 about 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 show it had killed almost 2,300 teachers by 2017." The latest education needs assessment found that out of 260 school sites, 28% had been damaged by bullets, shells or shrapnel, 20% had been deliberately set on fire, 32% had been looted and 29% had armed groups or military in proximity."

3.5 Poor Supervision

Poor supervision of counsellors in Nigerian primary schools is another problem affecting the performance of counsellors working in public primary schools. Asemah (2010) defines supervision as a way of advising, stimulating, guiding, improving, refreshing, encouraging and overseeing their operations in order for the supervisors to be successful in their task of supervision while Kamindo (2006) viewed supervision as leadership for the improvement of instruction and ultimately student learning. These definitions suggest that the role of supervision is to improve teaching and learning through a deliberate emphasis on ways and means of instilling excellence in the quality of instruction. Supervision is a process which strives to stimulate others towards greater effectiveness or productivity. Counsellors needs supervision to improve their service delivery at the primary schools. Research has it that public primary schools in Nigeria are poor supervised by the various institutions saddled with such responsibilities. Many counselors working in public primary schools in Nigeria are not enjoying maximum supervision due to many challenges such as inadequate supervisors, lack of mobility, inadequate funding and lack of supervision materials.

Ogunode, &Owobamigbe, (2021) observed that poor supervision of Guidance and Counseling programme in public primary schools in Nigeria is another problem affecting the service delivering of Guidance and Counseling the primary schools. Supervision of Guidance and Counseling is the process of helping the Guidance and Counseling teacher to grow professionally. It is a programme designed to guild and assist the Guidance and Counseling teachers to improve their Guidance and Counseling skills and ability. Guidance and Counseling teachers needs effective supervision to improve the quality of Guidance and Counseling services in schools. It is saddened that the supervision of Guidance and Counseling programme in many public primary schools by external supervisors is poor and ineffective. Factors accounting for poor supervision of Guidance and Counselling programme in Nigerian public primary schools include; poor funding of supervision, inadequate supervisors with specialization in Guidance and Counseling programme, insecurity, lack of transportation, political instability and changes in educational policies (Ogunode, &Owobamigbe, 2021).

3.6 Teaching of Large classes

Counselors teaching in Nigerian schools are found teaching large classes which is affecting their

performance. Counsellors are teaching large classes due to increase in enrolment in public primary schools. Ogunode, & Owobamigbe, (2021) and Suleiman, Olanrenwaju, & Suleiman, (2019), observed that American Personnel and Guidance Association (APGA) recommended that there should be a ratio of 1 to 250 (counsellors-students/clients). Ogunode, & Owobamigbe, (2021), Tucker, Hamayan, and Genesse (2006) and Umoh (2008) observe 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 (Ogunode, & Owobamigbe, 2021, Yusuf, Muraina & Jamiu 2019). Ogunode, & Owobamigbe, (2021) submitted that one of the problems facing the delivering of Guidance & Counseling in the Nigerian public primary schools is the problem of inadequate professional Guidance & Counseling teachers or trained Counsellors. Ogunode, & Owobamigbe, (2021) and Ugochuche (2013), observed that despite the fact that there are many holders of higher degrees in guidance and counselling in Nigeria today, not as many are qualified to be real counsellors because they lack the skills necessary for the practice. Owobamigbe, Ohunene, & Ogunode (2021) observed that there are many reasons that accounts for this shortage of trained Guidance and Counsellors in the various educational institutions across the country. Some of these factors include lack of strategic planning on Guidance and Counsellors production, inadequate funding of guidance and counselling programme, inadequate tertiary institutions offering guidance, increased in the population of students and counseling programme and unstable educational policies.

3.7 Negative Attitude of Students towards Counselors

Counsellors working in public primary schools in Nigeria are faced with the problem of negative attitude of students toward them. Many students do not have to counselors. Brown, (undated) did a study that investigated issues and challenges facing counsellors in Nigerian schools setting and was carried out in six selected states in Nigeria. The findings showed that, inappropriate recognition of counselling as a discipline, un-specified counsellors' roles and functions were issues facing the profession and counsellors in Nigeria. Lack of funds, rivalry by school heads and other personnel, clients' preferred matured counsellors, among others were challenges encountered. The study, revealed no significant differences in the issues and challenges experienced by counsellors on the basis of locations and gender, but, there is significant difference in the challenges facing counsellors based on age.

3.8 Negative Relationship between Counselors and School Administrators

Ogunode, & Owobamigbe, (2021) opines that many Counsellors teachers do not have maximum support of both the school administrators and teachers and this is affecting the services of guidance and counseling in many public primary schools in Nigeria. Odediran (2014), opined that counsellors face resistance, which might be stiff and persistent from principals and colleagues. Ogunode, & Owobamigbe, (2021) and Suleiman, Olanrenwaju, & Suleiman, (2019), submitted that it has been observed by many guidance counsellors that people often experience resistance from institutional heads, influential and significant members of staff of their establishments. Such officers often act in ways, which prevent the spread of counselling. Most times, counsellors tend to be viewed with suspicion by them. Some institutional heads might be apprehensive that the "new comer" counsellor does not erode their prestige or popularity and power among students, parents and members of the public (Ogunode, & Owobamigbe, 2021, Olayinka, 2012). Resistance of institutional heads may be reflected in their lukewarm, poor or reluctant attitude in supporting the programme or refusal to formally introduce the counsellor to other members of school staff.

3.9 Poor Motivation

Counsellors are the pivot on which guidance and counseling process hang. They can influence the guidance and counseling process outcomes either positively or negatively because they determine the quality of guidance and counseling instructional delivery. It has been observed that many counsellors working in the Nigerian educational institutions are poor motivated. Their salaries are not paid on time. They lack conducive working environment and this is affecting their productivities at work.

3.10 Poor Capacity Development of Supervisors

Poor capacity development of counsellors is another problem militating against effective delivery of guidance and counseling public primary schools in Nigeria. Some counselors working in various educational institutions are not constantly been exposed for training and retraining programme and this is affecting the performance of the counselors. Research has it that counselors that goes for training and retraining programme regularly performs better than those who do not go for training and retraining programme. The poor capacity development programme of counsellors is responsible for poor guidance and counseling service in public primary schools. This submission agrees with the conclusion of Adajo (2007) that argued that most of the personnel used as Counselors in most states in Nigeria do not have the pre-requisites counseling" qualification and experience. Most of the Counselors lack professional Counseling skills.

4.0 Recommendation

To address these problems, the following have been recommended increase in the funding of guidance and counseling programme, provision of more working tools, provision of adequate infrastructural facilities, provision of adequate security in public primary schools, improvement of supervision of guidance and counseling programme, employment of more trained counselors, increase in the salaries of Counsellors and ensure constant training and retraining programme for counselors.

The following recommendation were also made by Ogunode, &Owobamigbe, (2021):

1. The government should increase the funding of primary education and more allocation should be given to guidance and counseling programme in the primary school level.
2. The government should employ more professional guidance and counseling teachers and deploy to the public primary schools to improve the service delivering of the guidance and counseling in primary schools across Nigeria.
3. The government should ensure offices used as guidance and counseling rooms should be well furnish and all guidance and counseling resources are provided to motivate the students come for guidance and counseling services.
4. The government should improve on the supervision of guidance and counseling programme in the primary schools. This will help to improve the quality of guidance and counseling services in the public primary across the country by employing more guidance and counseling supervisors and providing adequate funding for guidance and counseling supervision.
5. The government and school administrators should provide the working materials guidance and counseling teachers needs to carry out her/his responsibilities in the schools. Materials like record books, ICT facilities, pens etc
6. 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

7. The school administrators and teachers should support the guidance and counseling teachers. This will help him or her discharge his/her responsibility effectively and efficiently.
8. The government should develop the political will to develop the guidance and counseling programme of primary schools by making policies to improve the quality guidance and counseling services at schools.

5.0 Conclusion

In conclusion, the roles of counselors in the realization of the primary schools objective cannot be underestimated. Counsellors working in public primary schools in Nigeria are facing many challenges. This paper examined the challenges facing Counsellors in public Primary schools in Nigeria and inadequate funding, lack of working tools, inadequate infrastructural facilities, insecurity problem, poor supervision, teaching of large classes, negatives attitude of students towards Counselors, negative relationship between counselors and school administrators, poor motivation and poor capacity development of supervisors were identified as challenges facing Counselors working in public primary schools in Nigeria. To solve these challenges, the presenters recommended the following: increase in the funding of guidance and counseling programme, provision of more working tools, provision of adequate infrastructural facilities, provision of adequate security in public primary schools, improvement of supervision of guidance and counseling programme, employment of more trained counsellors, increase in the salaries of Counsellors and ensure constant training and retraining programme for counselors.

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