

Full Length Research Paper

Professional challenges to counselling practice in primary schools in Anambra State, Nigeria: The way forward

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This study investigated the professional challenges to counselling practice of primary school counsellors in Anambra State. The population for the study was all the 415 counsellors practicing in the primary schools and all the 26 desk officers in the state. The population of the study is small so there was no sample; on the whole 441 counsellors were used for the study. Two research questions and two null hypotheses were used and descriptive survey design was adopted. Instrument used for data collection was the questionnaire developed by the researchers while percentage and t-test were used for data analysis. Findings from the study revealed that there are professional challenges in the primary school counselling as opined by the counsellors. In addition, all the counsellors agreed on all the items on how to move counselling practice forward. Based on the findings, recommendations were made including that counsellors should be exposed to on-line counselling through training in order to keep pace with the present level of globalization.

Key words: Counsellors, counselling practice, primary school, professional challenges.

INTRODUCTION

Issues surrounding professional challenges have continued to gain wide discussions in different quarters in the past decade. In the context of laying strong foundation for the overall development of primary school children, professional challenges to counselling practice have remained inconclusive. Primary education as the name implies is prime, sensitive, precious and crucial for laying the foundation for the overall development of the child yet the counsellors who are expected to handle these developmental issues are faced with numerous professional challenges which include lack of fund, lack of facilities and others. Nram (2005) sees primary education as the basic or introductory schooling that

children receive from 6 years and continuing to 11 years. Also there is ample research evidence by Gysbers and Henderson (2005), Sink and Spencer (2005) and Gladding (2003) that successful adult intellectual development has its root in the early years of primary education. In line with the above, Maduwesi (2005) opined that a sound primary education is a pre-requisite not only to sound secondary and tertiary education but to continuing education. Primary education as referred to in National policy on education (2004) is the education given in institutions for children aged 6 to 11 years

Considering the fact that primary school children face a lot of developmental problems which hinder their

intellectual, physical, social, emotional, moral and vocational development, counselling is most needed at this stage. This is because this stage is the first of all dimensions of development of the worth, dignity and maturity of the individual.

Agreeing with the above, Oraegbunam (2008) opined that since the primary school children are in their formative years they need mostly developmental and preventive counselling rather than remedial. This points to the fact that there is need for a redress in the primary education in Nigeria. Moreover, there is no doubt that early experiences have lasting effect on adult personality hence the need to guide and counsel them young. For counsellors to be effective in the primary schools adequate facilities are needed such as psychological tests that are culturally oriented. Probably these lack of counselling facilities expose them to being unimportant before the teachers.

Several authors had defined the concept of counselling in several expressions. Eze (2006) defined counselling as a helping relationship in which the counsellor assists the client to better understand himself and the world. Tambawal (2007) stated that counselling is concerned with the feelings, attitudes and emotional dispositions of an individual about himself and situations facing him. Counseling practice is mainly concerned with the ways of assisting the individuals to understand himself and the world around him, be able to utilize his potential to the fullest and live a normal and well-adjusted life.

Counselling in primary schools is in three dimensions namely resolution of problems, prevention of problems and growth counselling which is available to every child so as to enable him develop the hidden potentials and capabilities. However, there are some challenges facing the practice of counselling in primary schools which Oraegbunam (2008) listed as counselling-client ratio, non-recognition of counsellors by the headmasters, absence of counselling in the timetable. For Okere (2005), it is incompetence in handling pupils problems; Ifelunni (2005), dual job and lack of authority for execution of programmes; Nwokolo (2006), not giving free hand to organize guidance services and Akinade (2009), lack of proper knowledge in interpretation of psychological test.

According to the National Policy on Education NPE (2004) the objectives of primary education in Nigeria include:

- a. Inculcate permanent literacy and numeracy and ability to communicate effectively.
- b. Lay a sound basis for scientific and reflective thinking.
- c. Give citizenship education as a basis for effective participation in contribution to the life of the society.
- d. Mould character and develop sound attitude and morals in the child.
- e. Develop in the child the ability to adapt to the Child's changing environment.

f. Give the child opportunities for developing manipulative skills that will enable the child to function effectively in the society with the limit of the child's capacity.

g. Provide the child with the basic tools for further education and advancement including preparation for trades and crafts in the locality.

Statement of the problem

One cannot overemphasize the need for primary school guidance and counseling in Nigeria including Anambra State, because it is a psychological truism that assistance given to children early in life helps to ameliorate and offer some compromises in an effort to serious development and behavioral problems later in life. Cases of juvenile delinquency, drug and sexual abuse, disobedience to school rules and regulations lateness, use of abusive words among others are all reported dimensions of primary school children's problems which raise a lot of concern to counsellors, parents and other state holders. The resultant effect of this negative trend is evident in school dropout, low academic achievement, and emotional and mental distress maladaptive behavior. The Government realized that if the problem is not checked, it will malign the very fabric of Nigeria developmental efforts. This is why Government on the goals of Primary Education included counselling as one of the educational services (National Policy on Education, 2004:15). This study is imperative because despite the provision made for primary school counselling, the professional counsellors are facing a lot of challenges which this paper seeks to address and proffer a way forward. It is against this background that the researchers were motivated to empirically find out the professional challenges of primary school counselling practice and the way forward.

Therefore the main purpose of the study is to find out the professional challenges to counselling practice in primary schools in Anambra State. The study is limited to all the public primary school counsellors and desk officers in Anambra State. The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the professional challenges to counselling practice in primary schools in Anambra State?
2. What measures are essential for moving the counselling practice forward in Anambra State primary schools?

The study is further guided by the following null hypotheses:

1. There is no significant difference between the mean scores of counsellors in schools and desk officers in the office on the professional challenges to counseling practice.

2. There is no significant difference between the mean scores of counsellors in schools and desk officers in the office on the ways of moving counselling forward.

Conceptual frame work

Low (2009) looked at the challenges of counselling in a school setting in four dimensions namely internal, external, systems and personal challenges. According to him, internal challenges are concerned with clientele groups, teachers' attitudes towards counselling and pupils' willingness to seek counselling. External challenges are issues outside the school which include culture and globalization; system challenges are things within the programme which include law establishing its practice in schools, referral procedure and resource planning while personal challenges include skills and techniques of the counsellor including training, supervision and attitude towards the school system.

In another view point, Hatch (2008) stated that professional challenges in school counselling could be understood using three theories namely, organizational theory, institutional theory and political theory. This author sees organizational theory as how effective and efficient an organization is in accomplishing its goals and achieving the results the organization intends to produce. Scott (1992) defined organizations as collectivities oriented to the pursuit of relatively specific goals and exhibiting relatively highly formalized social structures. He went further to say that formal structures are instruments of goal attainment which can be changed or modified to improve employees' performance. He is of the view that school counselling programmes have not been perceived as having fixed divisions of labour and sets of rules that have been proven to govern the behaviour of school counsellors. He says that a few guidance programmes operate with clear formal structures, programme definitions or clear priorities. Olsen (1979) says that in school counselling, lack of planning, accountability or evaluation has led to fragmented and inconsistent programmes. He is of the view that when applying the organizational theory to school counselling programmes, there should be a means of ensuring that school counsellors are effective in performing activities in such a way that desired educational objectives are achieved. In support of Olsen, George (2004) maintained that school counselling must demonstrate its effectiveness if it is to survive.

Institutional theory, according to Hatch (2008) explains an organization's effort to institutionalize structural elements and processes that establish rules, policies and procedures. Therefore, institutional theory when applied to the school situation the theory explains that school counselling practice shows that rationalized myths exist in the school counselling profession. This means that different schools have different programmes for their

schools which are often guided by current internal and external cultural norms and pressures when making decisions regarding services and programme content rather than using the data generated from the check-list to inform students' needs. It is believed that from the institutional theory perspective, sharing results of counseling programmes enhances the legitimacy, because when school counsellors share results with policy actors within the school, the policy actors come to understand the school counsellors' vital role as contributors to student learning.

For the political theory, Wirt and Kirt (2001) defined politics as a form of social conflict rooted in group differences over values about the use of public resources to meet private needs. It is said that political decisions often hinge on two important weighted components namely, value versus resource. If a programme is highly valued, it is said to have earned social capital and resources are more likely to be allocated to implement it year to year. Applying political theory to the school counselling profession, his view is that counselling profession lacks ability to show that the value of the programme is worth their resource and has resulted in loss of positions, role definition and programmes. School counsellors have felt marginalized and isolated for many years. They have referred to themselves as outsider in school leadership and governance and are often directed by administration to perform tasks that they view as outside of their responsibility.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are some studies on the professional challenges to counseling practice, for instance Modo and George (2013) carried out a descriptive survey research in school and non-school setting in Akwa Ibom State. The sample was 80 counsellors selected through stratified sampling technique. The instrument for data collection was a researcher made questionnaire with reliability co-efficient of 0.78. Findings from the study revealed that the professional challenges were non-use of information and communication technology (ICT) in the counselling practice, that only 40% of the counselors are internet ready among others.

In an earlier development Ifelunni (2005) carried out a study in secondary school setting in Enugu State using 120 counsellors selected through random sampling. The instrument for data collection was a researcher made questionnaire which was duly validated by experts. Findings from the study revealed that the professional challenges include non-professionalization of counselling, low counsellor/student ratio and lack of recognition from the school administrators. Anagbogu (2008), in her own study, used 510 primary school counsellors selected through stratified random sampling technique. The researcher made questionnaire was duly validated by

experts with a reliability coefficient of 0.81. Findings from the study show that most of the counsellors were not allowed to practice fully, and they were not exposed to further training among others. It was then recommended that counsellors should be retrained through workshops and seminar especially in this era of technology. Anagbogu and Nwokolo (2010) lamented that in this era of globalization, that primary schools' counselling is still struggling to come to the lime light as others in the developed world, but the following challenges are yet to be overcome. Findings from their studies revealed that those necessities like computer, training the counsellors in ICT, counselling clinic, equipment for counselling such as radio, television, one-way mirror, generator and furniture are still lacking.

METHOD

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design to collect data from counsellors on the professional challenges to counselling practice in primary schools in Anambra State. The population was made up of all the 441 counsellors in primary schools in the state. The entire population of the study is small so there was no sample. Out of these 441 counsellors, 415 of them are practicing in schools while 26 are in the different offices of the State. (Source: Anambra State Universal Basic Education Board (ASUBEB), Awka Education Services Unit, 2011). The researchers made use of researcher made questionnaire titled "Professional Challenges to counselling practice" (PCCP). It has two sections. Section one sought information on the personal data of the subjects while section two comprised 34 items structured on a 4-point scale of strongly agreed, agree, disagree and strongly disagree on the professional challenges faced by counsellors in primary school.

Two experts from the Department of Guidance and Counselling, Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka validated the instrument and this helped in making minor modifications. The reliability was determined by administering the questionnaire to 40 counsellors in Delta State. The application of Kuder-Richardson formula 20 yielded a score of 0.82 for internal consistency which was considered ok. The researchers administered the questionnaire by themselves with the help of two-research assistants. The data obtained were analyzed using frequency, percentage and t-test. For clarity in presentation the four response cells of strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree were collapsed into agree and disagree.

RESULT

Only the items 3, 5, 16 19, scored less than 50% for agree. This indicates that the respondents did not see them as professional challenges to counselling practice. On the other hand, items 1, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 15 scored 100% each, which shows that the respondents totally agreed that they are the professional challenges to counselling practice in the primary schools (Table 1).

All the items scored above 50% in agreement (Table 2). This implies that all the respondents think these measures will move the counselling practice forward.

From Table 3 it can be observed that the practicing counsellors obtained a mean of 3.70 with standard

deviation of 1.90 while the office counsellors obtained a mean of 3.34 with standard deviations of 1.76. It can also be observed that calculated t-value 1.75 at 0.05 level of significance with degree of freedom 439 is less than the critical value of 1.96, the hypothesis is accepted. Therefore there is no significant difference in the counsellors mean scores due to their place of work.

From Table 4 it can be observed that the practicing counsellors obtained a mean of 3.10 with standard deviation of 0.72 while the office counsellors obtained a mean of 3.41 with standard deviations of 0.68. It can also be observed that calculated t-value 0.91 at 0.05 level of significance with degree of freedom 439 is less than the critical value of 1.96, the hypothesis is accepted. Therefore there is no significant difference in the counsellors mean scores due to their place of work, on the ways of moving counselling forward.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to find out the professional challenges to counselling practice. The study revealed that lack of counselling clinic, lack of computer for data storage, unavailability of internet facilities, lack of equipment like tape recorder, etc culture, low counsellor-client ratio, lack of counselling in the school timetable, topped the list among others as professional challenges to counselling practice in primary schools. The findings collaborate the studies of Anagbogu and Nwokolo (2010) and Oraegbunam (2008) who had earlier listed similar challenges in their previous work. The respondents, however, disagreed totally with the item which stated "incompetence on the part of the counselor". The disagreement on the part of the respondents probably may be due to the fact that they do not want to underrate their ability to deliver effective counselling skills and techniques.

The study also revealed that provision of adequate funds for counselling service, training and retraining counsellors in computer services, establishment of counselling outside the school setting, establishment of community-counsellor relationship, on-line counseling training, availability of counselling clinic, establishment of counselling commission are all measures of moving counselling practice forward as agreed by the respondents. This finding confirms the study of Tambawal (2007), who earlier suggested that relevant equipment and facilities needed for running the counselling programme should be provided. Okere (2005) observed that counselling in schools should be properly funded in order to increase outcome, Ifelunni (2005) advocated the establishment of counselling commission and Akinade (2009) suggested that counsellors should be trained and retrained on the use of psychological tests.

There is also no significant difference between the mean scores of practicing counsellors in schools and

Table 1. Response of counsellors' to professional challenges to counselling practice.

No.	Item	Agree		Disagree	
		F	%	F	%
1.	Lack of counselling clinic/laboratory	441	100	-	-
2.	Lack of funding for running counseling programmes	400	91	41	9
3.	Unavailability of Psychological test that are culturally oriented	441	100	-	-
4.	Lack of Computer for data storage	441	100	-	-
5.	Not being Computer literate	132	30	309	70
6.	Internet Facilities not available in the office	441	100	-	-
7.	Lack of trained counsellors for on-line counselling	441	100	-	-
8.	There is no receptionist to receive the clients	441	100	-	-
9.	Unavailability of equipment in Counsellors office	441	100	-	-
10.	Lack of furniture for group counselling	280	64	161	36
11.	Counselling not thoroughly addressed in the NPE (2004)	400	91	41	9
12.	Lack of uniform mode of operation e.g Nigeria counselling is different from American counselling	225	51	216	49
13.	Not Practicing counselling beyond the school setting	370	84	71	16
14.	Counsellors regarded as unimportant by teachers in the school.	280	64	161	36
15.	Counselor-Client ratio very poor e.g. 1 Counsellor --- 575 pupils (ASUBEB 2010).	441	100	-	-
16.	Incompetence on the part of the Counsellor.	-	-	441	100
17.	Headmaster not giving the Counsellor free hand to operate.	370	71	84	16
18.	Clients not willing to see the counsellor for personal problem.	397	90	44	10
19.	Culture of the people	441	100	-	-

Table 2. Responses of counsellors on measures to move counselling practice forward.

No.	Item	Agree		Disagree	
		F	%	F	%
1.	Provision of adequate funds for	441	100		
2.	Training and retraining counsellor in computer literacy	400	91	41	9
3.	Strengthening the data base of counselling through research	280	64	161	36
4.	Establishment of counselling outside the school setting	370	84	71	16
5.	Availability of counselling laboratory/clinic of counselling through media, jingle, etc.	280	64	161	36
6.	Awareness campaign on the importance of counselling through media, Jingle, etc.	353	80	88	20
7.	Advocacy visits to community leaders and other stakeholders by counsellors	441	100		
8.	Revision of counselling curriculum and infusion of current issues that affect all age level	441	100		
9.	Recruitment of more counsellors to reduce the counsellor-client ratio	419	95	22	5
10.	Government to include counsellors in the next national policy on education revision committee	441	100		
11.	Provision of office vehicle for counsellors	225	51	216	49
12.	Establish community-counsellors relationship for proper integration	441	100		
13.	Government to send counsellors to on-line counselling seminar, workshop etc	441	100		
14.	Training counsellors on proper interpretation of psychological tests	441	100		
15.	Sending counsellors for training abroad in order to integrate fully with international counselling	441	100		

desk offices (counsellors in the office) on their opinions on professional challenges and ways to move the profession forward. This may be due to the fact that counsellors irrespective of their place of training appear to be the same in this nation. Counsellors will therefore continue to remain the same in foreseeable future because they are being progressively exposed to common experiences in life in the context of western civilization and technology.

More so due to the fact that all guidance counsellors irrespective of the place of work are guided by the same ethics, it then shows that even though it accommodates individual with different backgrounds and culture, the same yardstick applies to members as regards conduct or behaviours. This is because ethical considerations in counselling consistently emerge as counsellors' competence, informed consent, confidentiality or child abuse.

Table 3. t- test summary of mean scores of counsellors on the professional challenges to counselling.

Variable	N	Mean	Sd	Df	Cal t value	
					Crit value	p
School counsellors	415	3.70	1.90	439	1.75	1.96
Office counsellors	26	3.34	1.76			

Table 4. t- test summary of mean scores of counsellors on the ways of moving counselling practice forward.

Variable	N	Mean	Sd	Df	Cal t value	
					Crit value	p
School counsellors	415	3.10	0.72	439	0.91	1.96
Office counsellors	26	3.41	0.68			

Conclusion

The professional challenges to counselling practice in primary schools are enormous as revealed by the study but there is still hope. This is because if all the suggestions for moving counselling forward as agreed by counselors are adopted then counselling in Nigeria will compete favorably with its counterparts in other countries especially those in the developed world.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings the following recommendations were made.

1. Relevant equipment facilities and furniture needed to run the counselling programme should be provided by the government.
2. School authorities should give the counsellor free hand to create awareness of the counselling programme and advertise the service he / she can render to both staff, pupil and parents, in the school and beyond.
3. Counsellors should go on advocacy visit to communities where they will advise parents in such communities to encourage their wards to often interact with the school counsellor. The counsellors are to help them deal with their vocational educational, personal or social problems.
4. Government should include counsellors when taking a decision that concerns them. For instance guidance and counseling was not properly addressed in the National Policy on Education.
5. Workshops and seminars should be organized for school heads who see counsellors as unimportant. These seminars will educate them and give them fresh orientation on the purpose for which counselling came into the primary school system in the first place.
6. Counsellors should be exposed to on-line counselling

through training in information technology (IT) in order to keep pace with present level of globalization

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