

CHALLENGES AND PROBLEMS OF PRACTICAL COUNSELLING IN NIGERIA

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BEING A PAPER PRESENTED AT THE MAIDEN CONFERENCE ORGANIZED BY GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING SECTION, DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, AHMADU BELLO UNIVERSITY, THEME: COUNSELLING AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT, CHALLENGES TO GUIDANCE COUNSELLORS, NOVEMBER 7TH – 10TH 2000.

Abstract

Modern counseling in school is relatively new and is facing a lot of challenges in being accepted by students, teachers, school administrators and the community where the school is located. Practical counseling is looked upon with lots of suspicion and distrust by other school staff. The counselor is not spared either until he proves his worth. This paper attempts to look into the problems of practical counseling with regards to the attitude of clients towards counselling and the belief of an individual towards modern counselling. Also, the attitude of school administrators or authorities towards the counsellor and counseling were discussed. The problem of insufficient test materials and the response of Nigerians towards test materials are discussed. Recommendations on improvement of practical counselling was made.

Introduction

Counselling according to Adams (1962) means "an interacting relationship between two or few individuals where one is the counsellor attempting to help the other who is a counselee to better understand himself in relation to his present and future problems. Practical counselling is an activity conducted in relation to affective realm which involves feelings, emotions and attitudes. It is the practical real life experience of rendering assistance to a needy person by a professional trained counsellor. Social and family life in Nigeria today, tends to encourage patronage of guidance and Counselling services. Traditionally, when an individual is faced with some common life problems, he goes to consult with an elder within the family. It is believed that the elder in a family setting, is vested with wisdom and authority. His counsel is highly regarded at times of difficulties. He acts as a surrogate counsellor to the family. With this type of counselling, a lot of wisdom is required. Wisdom is believed to reside in elders.

Counselling by elders is much more acceptable than the modern day type giving by trained professional counsellor. In this situation, there is great reluctance to patronize modern day counsellors who are relatively young people(Hassan,1991). Gesinde(1976) analyzing the problems facing counselling services in developing countries especially Nigeria, enumerated among others, inadequate and shortage of man power, paucity of psychological test batteries, problems of obtaining occupational information and cultural expectations as some of the major problems militating against the practice of rendering counselling services. In a similar vein, Makinde (1987) explained the causes of these problems in terms of human reaction to innovation. He emphasized that usually individuals are reluctant to relinquish the security of old and familiar ways for unknown and untested ones.

Hassan (1991) also discussed the problems confronting counselling practices and listed among others the Nigerian philosophical problem which centers around a man's belief and values that whatever befalls him, has a philosophical meaning and value. When a typical Nigerian is faced with problems, he prefers to offer sacrifices to the gods or appease the dead relatives and "evil forces" or rush to the mallams or diviners or herbalist rather than consult a counsellor. This lack of patronage for counselling poses a great threat to its survival.

In addition to the above, are the problems of the school authority who have a wrong role perception of the counsellor. These school authorities have held for some time the confidence of the student. With the counsellor coming into the school system, the counsellor is perceived as a "rival", or a "threat" to the school authority. Therefore, they try to protect their own "areas of influence" which they wrongly perceive that the counsellor would take a way from them. Alao (1991), Laosebikan (1980) and Hassan (1986) all opined that teachers have unfavorable attitudes towards practical counseling counsellors and this sort of attitude constitute a great obstacles to the acceptance of practical counselling in schools. The school authorities and teachers all perceive the presence of the counsellor as a device that is meant to further corrode their authority and therefore become jealous of the counsellor. This attitude of the school authorities and teachers are due to lack of knowledge and recognition of the counselors role.

Practical counselling in Nigeria faces the problem of not having a specific status and identity for practicing in school hierarchy of workers. For example, Denga (1983) has argued that most people say "the principal, i know, the teacher, i know, but who is the counsellor?". This issue of lacking specific status and identity, is a serious problem. In some institutions, especially the tertiary ones, it is observed that the practicing counselors are either under the registry or under deanery. What rank is the terminal point for a counselor who is practicing under the administrative setting in government establishment?. This is an area which the association should look into. On the issue of identity, the counselor usually floats and is tag or stigmatize on the various responsibilities that he carries out daily. For example, the problem of discipline in school is handed over to the copunsellor. This arises from the conception that the counsellor handles all cases of abnormal behaviour and should therefore, be involved with the discipline of students. This has generated an unending controversy while some people feel that the counsellor can be involved with the discipline of the students and at the same time to counsel him. Others do not share this view. Thus, there is need for counsellors to come in and take a common stand.

Most of the facilities use for practical counselling such as office space, chairs and tables are unimpressive. Hassan (1991) argued that there are insufficient facilities to effectively operate a counselling centre or unit. The situation is compounded by the lack of fund for counsellors in form of imprest. Furthermore, clients also make remarks on the poor facilities available. These unimpressive facilities may be affecting their perception of counseling and even the counselor.

The students still patronize, cooperate and do not prove difficult to the counselor. This is so because they know their problems and they want help in solving them.

Clients are referred to the counsellor either by friends, teachers, parents or other significant persons. The referral agents believe that counselling service can rendered a lot of help to the clients referred. This group of clients may prove difficult in the counseling session or relationship. They show resistance to the counsellor by refusing to open up or they tend to go round about their problems. At times, they would cover the exact situation or problem and pretend not to be aware of what is the problem. This type of situation truly puts the counsellor at a disadvantage position. He cannot help the client, thus, a problem to practical counselling because the client refuses to express himself and help was not given. Another type of problem counselors face are from clients who are invited by the counselors because they are identified through observation as having some concerns or problems which require the attention of a caring person. This group of clients could prove uncooperative towards the counseling relationship. Such clients could be those suffering from poor perception of what counseling relationship is all about or they simply do not want the counsellor to get to the root of their problems. These are problems which hinder the effectiveness of practical counseling in Nigeria.

Another fundamental problem in practical counseling in Nigeria is the issue of which theoretical framework to adopt. Aladejana and Alao (1986) described the Nigerian attitudes towards problem solving as "do it for me" counseling approach. They prefer directive approach in all its ramifications. This is because of the nature of Nigerians to attribute their actions and behaviours to the influence of significant others. This seems to conflict with the goal of counseling which recognizes the inherent ability of man to make a choice. All that a counselor does is to assist him while the client makes his choice and encourages him to take responsibility for his decision. Thus, a counselor does not do it for the client but the client is helped to harness his own resources to solve his own problems and a counsellor who does this, in solving a client problem is regarded as being ineffective.

According to Hassan (1991) there is shortage of made in Nigeria psychological tests and response taking of test for use are usually poor. Few locally constructed tests exist and these are those developed by Bakare, Okon, Akinboye, Obe and so on. They have not exhausted all the essential domains of diagnostic psychology. The issue is that there is relatively a dearth of

psychological test for counseling. On the issue of response taking, many Nigerians carry their superstitious beliefs to testing situation. They feel that their "secrets" would be known if they truthfully respond to psychological test. This phenomenon has made it quite difficult to apply the best therapeutic method when handling Nigerian problems. Hence, these have affected the practical counseling effectiveness to resolve the problems enumerated above and make practical counseling acceptable.

Recommendations

Based on the above listed challenges facing modern practical counselling, the following recommendations are made;

1. There is need for new area of study which would deal with marital and family counseling. This is to increase the value judgement and also widen the understanding of spouses and couples towards such issues in general and to seek for help when the need arises
2. There is need for counselors to conduct more researches on the culture and attitudes of Nigerians towards traditional counseling techniques and then see how modern counseling techniques could be merged and be use to make Nigerians more receptive towards modern trends of counseling.
3. There should be more campaigns and enlightenment on what modern counseling is outside and inside the school setting, so that people would know what counseling is all about rather than just having ideas about it.
4. There is need to utilized the services of the print and non-print media to sensitize society on the need to go for counseling on all aspects of human challenges.
5. There is no profession that saw itself on the top the day it came into existence. Its members worked hard to make it accepted and grow. As such counselors need work hard to make the profession grow, accepted and succeed in Nigeria. There is no magic outside hard work, determination and perseverance.

Conclusion

Guidance and Counselling has come to stay in Nigeria, as it is the bed rock for growth and development in other nations of the world, Nigeria cannot be an exception. Hands need be on desk to make counseling succeed and acceptable by all young and old in our society. As individuals at one time or another, we may encounter the need to share some of our problems with someone we can trust and that someone should be a counselor. Try a counselor and you may not regret that you did so.

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