

Needed Interventions for More Effective Counsellors' Role Performance in the School System in Edo and Delta States of Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigated teachers' opinions about principals needed interventions for more effective counselling services in schools. The purpose of the study was to ascertain teachers' opinion on what principals should do towards improving counselling services in schools. This study adopted the expo factor descriptive survey research design. The population of this study consisted of all teachers of secondary schools in Edo and Delta States. Purposive sampling procedure was used to select thirty-one schools with professional counsellors. The first five teachers, from each of the selected schools, who volunteered to participate in the study, were used. An instrument with open ended format was used to elicit responses from the subjects. The choice of open-ended format was to provide opportunity for respondents to speak their minds objectively and make meaningful responses without restraint. The instrument was personally administered to the respondents. The completed questionnaires were collected on the spot. The results obtained indicated ineffective planning for counselling activities, inadequate provision of enabling environment and work tools for counsellors and the deployment of school counsellors to perform non-counselling duties as constraints to effective performance of counselling roles in schools studied. The results also indicated that the non-existence of a collaborative working relationship between principals and counsellors and non inclusion of counselling periods in the school time-table are key areas of intervention by the school principal for effective counselling services. Based on the findings, it is concluded that school principals as major actors in the promotion of counselling services in school must rise up to their responsibilities. Principals' support for counseling services in a major ingredient for boosting performance of counsellors in schools. The study recommended a cocktail of principals' needed interventions to promote effective counselling services in schools.

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Introduction

Background of the study

The 2014 edition of the National Policy on Education in Nigeria places a premium on the role of school counsellors in actualizing the goal of education in Nigeria in primary and secondary schools in particular. School counsellors usually are statutory service providers in the school system. As stated in the policy, counsellors are expected to assist school children to overcome their educational, vocational and personality problems. In most school situations however, observations by concerned professionals have shown that school counsellors are rather used for rendering other services outside their cognate roles. Some schools make them to teach students in different subject areas where they have competence. This is contrary to their expected roles and a distraction from their core counselling duties in the school system. In order to overcome or correct this situation in Nigerian education, it is inevitable that the school counsellors need the support of other stakeholders in the school such as the principals and the teachers. This assertion is in agreement with the position of some scholars. Aluede and Egbochuku (2007) asserted that school counselling programme cannot be successful without the support of school principals and assistance of the teachers in the school. They stated further that team work between principals, teachers and counsellors is a necessity for the guidance programme to thrive in the school system. Also, Iwuama (2008) remarked that the failure of a school counsellor in the discharge of his or her professional duties, begin when the school principal is ill-disposed towards guidance programmes. Unachukwu and Igbogbor (2008) noted that the efforts of a genuinely active counsellor to organize and administer a guidance programme could be thwarted by the uncooperative attitude of the school principal. The major responsibility of the school principal in the area of guidance is to ensure that the great possibilities of the guidance programmes are realized at all times.

In view of the foregoing, it becomes relevant to find out what needs to be done to solve this problem. It is considered important in this regard that since teachers in the school situation constitute a significant other, their views or opinions about what the school heads or principals should do to help counsellors perform better, is considered vital to correcting the anomaly mentioned earlier in this paper above.

Teachers' opinions properly gathered or collated in an objective manner will be useful or convincing to school principals in changing their disposition towards assisting counsellors to do their work better. This is considered important because the school principal is the head of the school and where he or she stands on issues to a large extent, determines what happens. But if there are areas where principals are not doing well enough as in the case of counsellors, then useful information from other respected stakeholders in the schools such as teachers might help to change positively the situations of counsellors in terms of role performance.

Studies Adeyemo, Daodu & Elegbede (2012), Ogu (2014) and Ojeme,(2011) have shown that most of the time the school counsellors are prepared to do their best but when there are a lot of constraints in the school environment, it is possible that school counsellors become significantly incapacitated in carrying out their functions.

It is the role of scholars who are desirous of helping counsellors to improve their functions to find ways and means of re-engineering the school system through research in order to help it function better, particularly with reference to the role of the school counsellor.

This provides a strong rationale for this study which is focused on finding, in an objective and systematic manner, what principals should actually do to help counsellors improve on their counselling services in the school system.

Literature Review

The review of literature covers the following topics:

- i. The critical roles of the school counsellor in Nigerian schools.
- ii. Constraints affecting school counsellors' roles in Nigerian schools.

The Critical Roles of the School Counsellor in Nigerian Schools

The school counsellor is critically involved in all facets of the guidance activities. The counsellor can be described as professionally trained personnel, who provide services to students based on their needs, understanding of their immediate environment, the influences of the environmental factors on the students and the unique features of their schools. The counsellor in the school system has many vital roles to play, as indicated later in this paper. With the current trends in technology, it has become relevant to widen the scope of counselling in order to meet with the challenges of modern society in Nigerian schools. Ngwakwe (2016) asserted that school counsellors assist students to have an increased understanding of the educational, vocational and social information needed to make wise choices. Fakule (2011) views the school counsellor as one who renders professional assistance to students in order to help them solve their developmental and adjustment problem. Okeke (2003) posited that school counsellors provide technical services through which students' problems in academics, vocational and personal-social areas are tackled to enable students understand themselves and become more useful to selves and society. Egbo (2015), Rasaq, Abdullahi and Gafar (2015), Okeke (2003), Ipaye (1983), Ngwakwe (2016), Ojeme (2011), Agi (2013) and Alutu (2006), are in agreement with the following as the key roles or functions of the school counsellor: Counselling, planning and development of the guidance programme, collection and dissemination of information, appraisal, educational and occupational planning, referral work and placement. In furtherance appreciation of the roles of school counsellors, CASSON (2013), posited the following:

- i. Educational guidance and counselling. This is the assistance given by the school counsellor to students in order to help them function more effectively in their school progress.
- ii. Vocational guidance and counselling. This is the process of helping students to identify their potentials, aptitudes/abilities and interest and match such with available job opportunities to facilitate their effective adjustment in their chosen career.

- iii. Personal-social guidance and counselling. This is the counselling services given to students in order to assist them overcome their personal social problems and needs.

Others include: orientation of new students, referral services, Liaison and follow-up services, keeping of students' records etc.

From the above highlighted functions of the school counsellor, the roles of the counsellors are varied, sensitive and cumulative in nature. It is conceivable from the foregoing, that the school counsellor is professionally trained to identify the specific needs of each student and to plan an appropriate programme to assist students to overcome their educational, vocational and personal-social problems

Constraints of School Counsellors' Roles in Nigerian Schools

In spite of the values or importance of guidance and counselling services and the progress it has made in recent times, it is not without issues and challenges. Ikeotuonye and Ukwueze (2014) noted that there are issues in the implementation of guidance and counselling programme over the years. They claimed that the implementation of guidance and counselling activities in the school is bedeviled by the lack of administrative support, inadequate office accommodation and working tools. Scholars have opined that the effectiveness of a counsellor in the school system depends largely on principals' support and provision for the school counsellors' work. Nwigwe (2008), also observed that guidance and counselling functions are being hijacked by non-professional in many schools in Nigeria. Ojeme (2011), in a study on Critical Incidents Facilitating school Counsellor-Principal relationship, established that school counsellors were deployed to perform non-counselling duties such as teaching, registration and scheduling of all new students etc. This performance of non-counselling functions distract from the conduct of core counselling roles and could lead to the neglect of counsellings duties as stipulated in the National Policy on Education (1977) and its subsequent editions.

Nwamuo and Ugwuegbulem (2011), in their study on challenges of effective implementation of guidance and counselling Programme, found out that the lack of policy documentation backing up guidance and counselling programme enabled principals to assign teaching role to school counsellors. Bukoye (2012), observed from a study on challenges facing counsellors in schools that many schools do not have professional counsellors and where there are, they are not usually more than one or two counsellors in large schools. This has led to a very high ratio of students to a counsellor. From the foregoing literature review, the constraints of counselling services in schools are summarized as follows:

- i. Lack of administrative support and provision of enabling environment, working materials and tools.
- ii. Deployment of counsellors to perform non-counselling duties.
- iii. Assigning counselling duties to school teachers.
- iv. Non-inclusion of counselling periods in school time table.
- v. Shortage of professional counsellors in schools.
- vi. High ratio of students to a counsellor.

Statement of the Problem

Arising from the foregoing background, the problem of this study is predicated on the need to provide credible information on how school principals can best assist counsellors to do their work from the perspective of the school teachers.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study therefore, is to conduct an empirical survey to find out what teachers opinions or views are on what principals should do to help counsellors to perform their duties better.

Research Question

As a guide to this study, the research question below was raised for the study:
What are the teachers' opinions about principals needed interventions towards the enhancement of counselling services in Edo and Delta States of Nigerian school system?

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted the expo-factor descriptive survey research design. The choice of this research design according to Owie (2006) is informed by the fact that it is suitable for collecting data on the teachers' opinions or views on what school principals should do to promote counselling services as they believe without any manipulation of the subjects. The research design explains opinions that are held by teachers and processes that are going on as they exist.

Sample and Sampling Technique

Purposive sampling procedure was used to select thirty-one schools from Edo and Delta States of Nigeria, seventeen schools from Delta State, and fourteen schools from Edo State. Only schools with professional school counsellors were used for the study. It was observed that some schools do not have professional counsellors. The first five teachers to volunteer from each of the thirty-one schools were used for the study. This gave a total of one hundred and fifty-five teachers who participated in the study.

Instrumentation

An unstructured instrument, which consisted of one question put in an open ended format, was designed to elicit responses from the teachers in Edo and Delta States of Nigerian school systems. The open ended format was used for the study in order to provide opportunity for respondents to speak their minds and make meaningful responses without restraint.

The instrument was validated by two experts in the field of guidance and counselling and one expert in measurement and evaluation. Their inputs were applied to prepare

the final draft. A reliability co-efficient of 0.63 was obtained using the test retest method.

Technique of Data Collection

In order to ascertain teachers' opinions or views on what principals should do to help counsellors to perform their duties better, a total of one hundred and fifty-five questionnaire copies were personally administered to the respondents. However, only one hundred and twenty-nine questionnaires that were completely filled were analyzed for the study.

Technique of Data Analysis

To analyze the data on teachers' opinion or views collected, each of the responses were coded for themes. Similar themes were grouped together while duplicated themes were collapsed in order to provide greater focus and clarity of results. The data were analyzed using frequency counts and percentage of responses to determine the needed interventions of school principals towards the enhancement of counselling services.

Presentation of Result

Research Question: What are the teachers' opinions about principals' needed interventions towards the enhancement of counselling services in Edo and Delta States of Nigeria school system?

The data of this research question is presented in Table I below

Table I: Teachers' Responses on Principals' needed interventions in Enhancing Counselling Service.

S/N	Theme	Sub-Theme	n= 129 Frequency
1	Effective planning for counselling activities and programmes	Planning orientation	2(1.55)
		Sending counsellors to attend seminars and workshop	4(3.10)
		Planning career day and excursion	
		Involvement of counsellors in decision making	4(3.10)
		Inclusion of counselling periods in the school time table	2(1.55) 10(7.75)
2	Support and provision of enabling environment for counsellors	To be supportive of counsellors	15(11.63)
		Provision of fund	8(6.20)
		Provision of enabling environment and work tools	52(40.31)
3	Positive relationship with counsellors	Collaborative working relationship with counsellors	11(8.53)
		Creating interactive session between counsellors and students	4(3.10)
4	Deployment of counsellors to professional duties	Professional counsellors to mind counselling duties	8(6.20)
		Deployment of male and female counsellors to large schools	1(0.77)
		Counsellors to spend longer hours in schools	1(0.77)
5	Negative comments	Counsellors should be made to teach	3(2.33)
		No need for counsellors, teachers can perform their roles.	4(3.10)

Figures in parenthesis represent percentage distribution of responses.

An examination of the Table reveals that teachers' responses are grouped into five themes. Theme one consists of five sub-themes n=22 (17.05). Theme two consists of three sub-themes n=75 (58.14). Theme three consist of two sub-themes n=15 (11.63). Theme four consists of three sub-themes n=10 (7.74). Theme five consists of two sub-themes n=7 (5.43). The total n=129(99.99)

Discussion of Findings

The school principal is a major actor in the promotion of counselling services, as an authority figure. The opinions of the school teachers in this study concerning what the

principals need to do to promote counselling services in Edo and Delta States school system are presented in Table I. 58.14% of teachers indicated that school principals' provision of enabling counselling resources is the most effective way to promote counselling activities in the school system. This suggestion is a pointer that counsellors' needs are possibly not being met satisfactorily. The finding seems to be in consonance with the findings of Ikeotuonye and Ukwueze (2014), Odeniyi (2011), Ojeme (2015) Aluede and Egbochuku (2007) which revealed that counselling materials are partially provided in schools. Also the study of Ohovwore (2015), which revealed that counsellors' needs are not being met satisfactorily in schools, aligns with the findings of this study. Precisely, Ohovwore, in his research, reported that only 56.03% of the principals sampled indicated that they have counselling room for their counsellors to perform their duties creditably. This is to say that there is still much to be done in terms of meeting the needs of counsellors in schools in spite of the recognition of the relevance of guidance and counselling services in the National Policy of Education (1977) and the subsequent editions. Perhaps one of the reasons for the neglect of counsellors' needs could be because many school heads erroneously believed that administrators and teachers could perform counselling duties and that there is no special skills required in performing counselling services. This explains also the reason why teachers are assigned to perform counselling roles as observed by Ojeme (2011) Nwigwe (2008) and Nwamuo and Ngwegbulem (2011). The reason for this could also be because of the lack of policy documentation backing functional guidance and counselling programmes in schools as opined by Nwamuo and Ugwegbulem (2011). The issue of fund also could deter the provision of counselling materials and work tools. Perhaps, fund allocated for guidance and counselling programme by the Ministry of Education may be grossly inadequate. Lack of proper funding could inhibit the rapid growth and spread of counselling activities leading to the failure of the actualization of the aims of education as stipulated in the National Policy on Education.

Also, 17.05% of teachers also suggested effective planning of counselling programmes such as inclusion of counselling period in the school time table, planning career day and excursion as well as sending counsellors to attend seminars and workshops. 11.63% of responding teachers suggested maintenance of positive relationship with school counsellors. While 7.74% of teachers suggested deployment of counsellors to mind professional duties only. However, Ohovwore (2015), found out from his study that teachers acknowledged the relevance of school counsellors in the school system. 71% of teachers' awareness of the relevance of counsellors is reported in the findings of his study. This corroborates the views of Aluede and Egbochuku (2007) who reported that most teachers perceived counsellors as positive contributors to the school instructional programme. They further stated that many teachers strongly acknowledged the caring attitude of counsellors, their accessibility and time spent with the students. These responses are viewed as very useful and indicative of teachers' critical knowledge of the role of school principals in promoting counselling services in schools. School teachers' recognition of the relevance of school counsellors is worthy of note. Teachers are professional colleagues in the school system and their support of the place of counsellors is a vital factor for the latter's success in their professional roles. School teachers are most likely, therefore, to reciprocally collaborate with school counsellors in their work. This should be hardly surprising because as co-professionals who are involved in the education enterprise in the school system, their own need for principal's support may just be

similar to the counsellors' needs. It also means that school counsellors must band with teachers or seek teachers' support in pressuring school principals to meet their needs particularly in those areas in which they share agreement.

Conclusions

The following conclusions were drawn from the findings of the study.

1. The provision of enabling environment and work tools for counsellors' conduct of their cognate roles in the school system in Edo and Delta States of Nigeria, is unsatisfactory as perceived by teachers.
2. School principals are not very supportive of counsellors in the schools studied in Edo and Delta States of Nigeria.
3. There is little or no collaborative working relationship between the school principals and school counsellors.
4. The schools' curriculum do not satisfactorily accommodate counselling sessions in the school time-table.
5. Professional counsellors are deployed to perform non-counselling duties in the schools studied.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are put forward as effective ways for school principals to promote counselling activities in the school system.

1. Principals should be re-oriented through workshops and seminars on the need for a change of attitude towards the enhancement of counselling services in schools.
2. Principals should endeavour to lend support to school counsellors' quest and desire to properly execute their professional roles in schools, by providing enabling environment and logistics support, such as working materials and tools.
3. There is need for school principals to maintain a cordial and collaborative working relationship with the school counsellors as a basis for counsellors' effectiveness in the school system.
4. Efforts should be made by Government supervisory agencies to enact policies that would dissuade school principals from deploying school counsellors to perform non-counselling duties in the schools as this is a distraction from their cognate roles.
5. The school time-table should be revisited to accommodate regular counselling session in and out of school hours.

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