

## Functional Counselling Services and Development of Literacy in the Management of Secondary Schools in Nigeria

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### **Abstract**

*Literacy is the act of reading development, progression of skills that involves the ability to understand spoken words, decoding of written words, and culminating in the deep understanding of text. The paper looked at guidance counselling services and its influence towards the effective development of literacy among student in the Nigeria secondary school sector. Traditionally, literacy is the ability to use written language actively and passively. In this study, Some key sub-headings were discussed such as; the concepts of different terms, a brief history of guidance and counseling, the role of the counsellor in the school system; tools required for its professional practices, its present status in the nations educational system and the factors that impede its effective services. The concept of literacy was explored and the challenges/issues towards its attainment in the secondary level of education was stated. In conclusion, the paper recommends the need for functional guidance and counseling programmes in Nigeria's secondary schools as a key agents of literacy development of any nation.*

**Keywords:** Counselling Services, Literacy, Secondary Education Management and Challenges of Access.

### **Introduction**

The ultimate goal of all learning experiences is to bring about a change in behaviour. If this change must take place, the students must make some genuine efforts towards bringing about such a change. The student must study, that is, he must apply his mind to the acquisition of knowledge. He must engage in in-depth and methodical thinking, reflection, attentive observation and careful detailed investigations. The student must be totally and personally involved. Ekennia (1991) as cited in Iwuama (2004) viewed learning as a psychological concept which affects not only an individual's ability to reason and think, but also his "*personality, interpersonal relationships and physical activities*". Thus, it can be seen that study is work which is an essential factor for success in all life's endeavours, it requires making genuine inputs in terms of time, energy, attention, concentration and steadfastness if success is to be achieved. The primary sense of literacy still represents the lifelong, intellectual process of gaining meaning from a critical interpretation of the written or printed text, "The key to all". Literacy is reading development, a progression of skills that begins with the ability to understand

spoken words and decode written words, and culminates in the deep understanding of text (Olayode,1999).With the above definition of literacy, the role of the educational guidance counselor cannot be over emphasized as they help the students to master such skills as: How to study; Taking notes; Library use; Reading strategies ,etc. Counseling as a helping service is both preventive and curative.

Iwuama (2004), agree that counseling is a learning process in which individuals learn about themselves, their personal relations, and behaviours that advance their personal development. it has also been seen as an essential integral part of educational programme which focuses on the total development of the child-socially, mentally, vocationally, personally ,in staff consulting and parents/ guardians help towards the learner, and should be recognized, for a high positive result towards building literacy in Nigeria.(Uba, 1990).

### **History of Guidance and Counselling in Nigeria**

The genesis of formal guidance and counselling in Nigeria dates back to the 50's (1959 to be precise), a year in which a group of catholic Reverend sisters at the St. Theresa's college, Oke Ado, Ibadan organized formal careers guidance programme for their graduating final year student (Adana, 2004). The sisters vision was anchored on the students need for information about the world of work and to be trained in human relations. The programme produced a positive result as a follow up to this and for subsequent graduating students, lectures, seminars and guidance workshops were organized. The interest in student's life as Adana (2004) put it later formed the nucleus of the Ibadan careers Council in 1962 which later metamorphosed into Nigeria careers council in 1967. In the year 1976, the Counseling Association of Nigeria an off-shoot of the Nigeria Career council, was launched and the association through her dynamic leaders has witnessed some other notable achievements such as:

- (1). Minimum standards for counselling training which includes, inclusion of guidance and counselling in the National Policy on Education (NPE) and indicates the purpose of counselor education therefore as to ensure that students acquire sufficient knowledge to enable them practice effectively.
- (2). Blueprint on guidance and counselling for educational institution in Nigeria a working document, guidelines sequentially structured to reflect the counselling needs of students from pre-primary through secondary to tertiary institutions. The objective of the blueprint is to afford a common focus or a reference point for the practitioners. (Adediran, 2003; Adama, 2004).
- (3). The recognition of guidance counselor as full-time professional in school: thus, in the National Policy on Education (FRN,2004) a policy statement was made with respect to the implementation of guidance and counselling in schools. In view of the apparent ignorance of young people and in view of personality maladjustment among school children. Thus, with the categorical statement in National Policy of Education, Guidance and Counselling in Nigeria has come to stay.

### **Counseling Services in Nigeria**

Formal guidance services are more than three decades old in Nigeria. It is pathetic to note that Guidance services in Nigeria are still in their embryonic stage of development in spite of the over-three decades of existence. The service are still plagued by such problems as lack of adequate trained personnel; poor attitude from parents, principals, teachers, students and

governments; etc. Many individuals and governments have recognized the need for and importance of guidance services in the Nigeria educational system. However, attention have been focused on secondary schools and tertiary institutions with very little attention, if any, paid to the primary school sector. Thus, with the categorical statement in the National Policy on Education, guidance and counselling in Nigeria has come to stay but the effective implementation and practice of this programme, however, has not been without problems since its inception. What are these problems? What are the things that are being done right and what can be done to improve upon the situation for the sake of literacy? What does the future hold for counselling in Nigeria especially in view of literacy?

### **Guidance Service**

Nigeria has come a long way in her educational development plan for example, the present 6-3-3-4 educational system which is about to give way to the 9-3-4 system tends to lay emphasis on functionality and self-reliance. This means that any child who is unable to continue his education at the end of each tier of the 6-3-3-4 system can in fact end his education there and still be gainfully employed. This obviously could have been the case if the educational personnel know their role and functions in the successful implementation of the new educational system. It is obvious that the modern principal can no longer cope with the numerous and varied responsibilities of the school system, the need has risen for the counselor to assist in the effective administration of the school. Any attempt to neglect this will be tantamount to performing today's task with yesterday's tools. In what ways therefore can the counselor contribute towards the cooperative venture of administering the school in our setting for the benefit of the Nigeria child.

Guidance and counselling is a specialized helping process whereby information is disseminated to a group or to individuals. It is also an interaction in which individuals are led to find possible solutions to their problems, and decisions are then made for a better and a more stable future. It aims at helping the individuals understand their strengths and weaknesses and their world which includes educational or academic, vocational or career and personal social world, to understand who they are and what they can do as unique individuals. These goals are in consonance with the general goals of education, teaching and learning. Therefore, for the schools to achieve these general goals, there is need for integration of guidance and counselor into the total school curriculum at all levels (Uba, 1990).

### **The Roles of Guidance Counselor**

One of the challenges being faced by counselors in Nigeria is establishing credibility and securing recognition for guidance and counselling as a vital force for the advancement of literacy in a developing economy such as Nigeria. Coupled with this, is lack of the necessary wherewithal to translate counselling theories into practice. To better appreciate the roles of counselors in literacy development, the job description of the school counselor as itemized by Counseling Association of Nigeria (CASSON, 2003), are hereby highlighted:

1. Orientation of new students
2. Educational counselling
3. Vocational counselling
4. Personal/social counselling

5. Referral services
6. Follow-up services
7. Liaison and follow-up services
8. Keeping of students records, etc.

### **1. Orientation services**

As part of his/her schedules of duties, the school counselor welcomes new students; talks to them on the history, philosophy, status, programmes, achievements, problems, rules and regulations, clubs, aspirations, etc of the school and exhorts them to identify themselves with the progress of the school which will translate into their own progress eventually; provide them with skills for self-management; conducts them round the school premises and facilities, takes them round the neighborhood of the school, serves as a parent especially to those whose parents or guidance are far from the school setting and organizes orientation/induction service to new members of staff.

### **2. Educational Counselling**

The school counselor supervises the studies of the students, monitors students' academic performance at regular intervals; administers tests on academic matters, scores them, interprets them and uses them for counselling interventions; counsels students with study problems; guides students on such academic matters as the choice of school subjects and the completion of JSS, SSCE or JAMB forms; consults teachers and liaises, with parents on students' academic performance, and involves them in the counselling programme; handles disruptive or problematic students, groups or classes; keeps records of students' progress; equips students with study skills and provides them with necessary resources for studying; identifies special students for attention-e.g. handicapped ones, underachievers, repeats, frustrated students, etc; Guidance and counsels teachers and parents on academic matters; helping in placing transferred students into appropriate classes; Arranges remedial classes for students with identified shortcomings in consultants with their parents or at their requests; provide information on educational academic matters etc, for an efficient and smooth discharge of these role and functions, the provisions of the following facilities as identified by Adana (2004) are imperative.

1. Conducive office facility
2. Materials and storage facilities
3. Communication facilities, and
4. Finance/fund for achievement of educational programmes, objective and plans.

For effective literacy programme to thrive, there must be adequately furnished and conducive spacious office facilities for group and individual counselling sessions and for accommodation. In view of the realities of globalization, a computer outfit is necessary for easy storage and retrieval of data. There are a number of computers software packages that can aid information retrieval and appraisal services.

Furthermore, the work of the counselor can be greatly enhanced with the availability of communication gadgets, as the world is gradually turning into a global village, there is need to provide internet services to assist them remain in touch with latest information around the world for the sake of putting it across to the students. Finally, for the counselor to prosecute functional guidance programmes such as the careers day, field trips, guidance workshops and seminars adequate funds are needed.

### **3. Vocational Counselling**

The counselor provides students with occupational information, administers vocations tests, scores and interprets them and uses them in counselling students and parents, guides and counsels students and parents on vocational choice and combination of students and helps in resolving conflicts in such matters and fosters vocational development in students, arrange careers talks, vocational visits to professional and vocational centers, promotes vocational clubs and organizes vocational experiences.

### **4. Personal/Social Counselling:**

The school counselor counsels students on their personal and social matters and problem, administers, scores, interprets tests on personal/social matters and problems and uses the result for counselling, fosters personal and social development in students through individual and group programmes.

### **5. Referral services:**

The school counselor refers clients to other professionals as occasion requires processes, evaluates and uses data and other inputs from referrals for counselling, takes up cases referred to him for counselling, assessment, placement, consultations etc and gives feedback to the referring agencies. The effective and efficient implementation of the school guidance programme in Nigeria will remain a mirage giving attention to the roles of the counselors as agents of literacy development among the students.

According to Adanna (2000), the provisions of these facilities are of utmost importance for the growth of literacy programmes in the developing countries, for utmost efficiency of the counselor in the discharge of his/her functions.

### **Impediments to Effective Guidance Services**

Owing to the awareness of the role that guidance and counselling plays in the nation's educational system vis-à-vis national development, the Federal Government of Nigeria in the third National Development Plan (1975-1980), made a categorical statement on guidance and counselling as follows:

1. It is further realized that for education (reading and writing) to be complete, the beneficiaries must have a good sense of self fulfilment. This particular feeling must go with the rights choice of programme and career. Such choices are best identified at the secondary school stages of a student's education. The absence of career counselling in our educational and training systems in the past must be held responsible for the frustration observed among many of the nation's young men and women. To remedy the situation, guidance and counselling personnel will be institutionalized in all the nation's educational training programmes.
2. The policies/direction of the Federal Government to state ministries of education on employment in schools is still not very effective in many areas where they exist, counsellors in most schools have no clear-cut roles to perform in the school counselling programmes they are to implement.
3. School counselling is still presented in most schools such as auxiliary function, subject to principals', teachers', parents' and pupils' attitude and acceptance. Thus, guidance and counselling in the nation's secondary schools is still struggling to find its feet, as many still do not believe that specialist is needed for guidance and counselling.

The traditionalists deny the need for professional counsellors because in the traditional ideology, every elderly person in the closely knit extended family system

is expected to give guidance and counselling to his/her brothers and sisters that are traceable by blood relation. Even school administrators of the old authoritarian order think that teachers who opt for guidance and counselling are 'escaping' from teaching which to them is the primary and most important function of the school. Toward this end, guidance and counselors, where they exist, in most schools are made to teach and some are converted to a mere clerks!

4. The government at the centre has made much lip service pronouncements on guidance and counselling without the required financial budgets, often have education taking a large share, but much attention is usually focused on providing classrooms and purported instructional materials. As one top official in the Education Ministry puts it, one has to choose between providing classrooms and teachers to combat high level of literacy and the luxury of special professionals known as guidance counselors what then does the future holds for lecturers.

**1. Adequate Provision of Appraisal tools for Counselling:** Among these tools are:

- (a). Bakare's 1977 student problem inventory (SPI).
- (b). Study habit inventory (SHI)
- (c). Vocational interest Inventory (VII)
- (d). Motivational occupational preference scale (MOPS)
- (e). Student teacher questions on behaviour problems, (1974)
- (f). Ekennia's (1991) study behaviour inventory (SBI)
- (g). Odoemelam's (1995) pupils behaviour problems inventories and scales
- (h). Iwuji's (1986) self-concept inventory (SCI).

This list, though not exhaustive, demonstrates progress in the development of the Nigeria's child's reading and writing process.

2. Provision of Physical Facilities and Funding
3. Adequate communication between counselors, principals, teachers and students
4. Trained qualified counselors and high ratio of students
5. Adequate time allotment for counselling sessions.
6. Emphasis on sex stereotyping and occupational counselling
7. Adoption of indigenous counselling theories to the Nigeria school setting as a developing nations as a result of the conflict between traditional and Western counselling theorist.
8. Increase implementation and maintenance of ethical standards in practicing school counselling by the educational authorities.

### **The Concept of Developing Literacy**

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) defines literacy as the 'ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts'. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society. Traditionally, literacy is the ability to use written language actively and passively; one definition of literacy is the ability to "read, write, spell, listen, and speak". Since the 1980's, some have argued that literacy is ideological, which means that literacy always exists in a context, in tandem with the values associated with that context. Prior work viewed literacy as existing autonomously. Some have argued that the definition of literacy should be expanded.

For example, in the United States, the National Council of Teachers of English Association have added “*visually representing*” to the traditional list of competences. Similarly, in Scotland, literacy has been defined as: “the ability to read, write and use numeracy, to handle information, to express ideas and opinions, to make decisions and solve problems, as families members, workers, citizens and lifelong learners. The term literacy also refers to possession of enough reading and writing ability to function in society. People are called functionality illiterate if they cannot read or write well enough to carry out common activities such as employment, school work, or voting, career, choice etc (Lane, Mitchell and Tinn.Eds,1997).

They go on to state that there are two different ways to measure literacy. They are:-

- (1). People are considered literate if they have completed a certain number of years in school.
- (2). People’s skills are tested to determine whether they are literate or illiterate. Measure of literacy however, according to them are not exact and cannot be easily compared.

However, the level of literacy of any nation or tribe is closely associated with the economic power level of development of the people involved. Literacy is viewed as a flexible group of skills and strategies that are closely linked to context and purpose. Contemporary views of literacy have moved beyond simple prints literacy to encompass notions of active citizenships, new communication’s practices and information technologies, critical thinking and linguistic and cultural diversity. The multiplicity of literacy practices has led many educators to use the plural terms “*literacy practices*” and “*Multiliteracies*” to emphasis the diverse ways that we use the non-verbal, spoken, print, visual and multimodal communications practices of the world in which we live. One definition of literacy by United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO, 2013) is that literacy is the ability to read and write and use written information and write appropriately in a range of contexts. It also involves the integration of speaking, listening, viewing and critical thinking with reading and writing and includes the cultural knowledge which enables a speaker, writer or reader to recognize and use language appropriate to different social situations.

**Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: The Challenges/Issues of Access**

One of the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in the education sector is that of access. The clarion call by nations for the attainment of the goal of “*education for all*” attained a crescendo in the past decade. But to what extent has this goal been attained by nations particularly in Africa and more directly in Nigeria Education System (Mkpa, 2014).

**Table 1: Distribution of Out of School Children In Selected Countries**

S/No.	Country	Year	No. of Children
1.	Yemen		949,000
2.	Thailand	2009	611,000

3.	Philippines	2009	1,460,000
4.	India	2010	1,674,000
5.	Pakistan	2009	5,436,000
6.	Ghana	2012	641,000
7.	South Africa	2009	679,000
8.	Mali	2009	850,000
9.	Niger	2012	957,000
10.	Kenya	2009	1,010,000
11.	Burkina Faso	2012	1,015,000
12.	Cote d'Ivoire	2009	11,610,000
13.	Ethiopia	2007	1,703,000
14.	Nigeria	2010	10,542,000

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics Database (2013)

The table speaks for itself and challenges Nigeria to accept the task of addressing the problem by taking her destiny in her own hands. A report by the United Nations Educational and Cultural Organization Institute for Statistics Headquarters and signed by the Director General of UNESCO Irina Bokava (2013) contained the following highlights:

1. Over 766 million adults worldwide are still illiterates; two thirds of these numbers are women, while 75 million children are out of school with very high drop-out rates.
2. 57 million children were out of school in 2011.
3. More than 20% of African children have never attended primary school or have left school without complete primary education.

Redman (2013) is of the view that Nigeria accounts for about one fifth of the entire World's out-of-school children, that is about 10.5 million or more children. Stated more directly, Nigeria has the highest number of school drop-outs in the whole world. An earlier but more comprehensive set of data gleaned from the internet and credited to Demographic and Health Survey (2008) presents the following information on access, The data source referred to above: that is, Demographic and Health Survey, further revealed among other facts that less than a half of secondary school age youths attend school with males showing slightly greater likelihood than female to attend.

- i. 49% of youths, ages 12-17 attend secondary school.
- ii. 51% of males, ages 12-17 attend school as against 46% of females.
- iii. 24% of secondary schools youth are either overage or under the official age range.
- iv. In urban areas, 64% of children of school age attend school compared to 41% in rural areas.

**Table 2: Distribution of Secondary School Net Attendance Rate By Zone: Nigeria**

S/No.	Zone	Percentage of Male Attendance	Percentage of Female Attendance	Mean Percentage Attendance
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1.	North-Central	41	49	45.0
2.	North-East	21	28	24.5
3.	North-West	19	34	26.5
4.	South-East	69	68	67.5
5.	South-South	66	67	66.5
6.	South-West	69	69	69.0

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- i. The South-West has the highest secondary net attendance (69%) while the North-East has the lowest (24.5%).
- ii. Disparity in gender is highest in North-West and in the South-West.
- iii. 85% of women, aged 15-24 in urban areas can read compared to 53% in rural areas.
- iv. 32% of women, aged 45-49 can read and 68% of women, aged 15-19 can read.

The current picture is that the literacy rate for 15-24 years old stands at 72.1% just 11 percentage points higher than the adult literacy of 61.3%. At the secondary level, the gross enrolment ratio (percentage of all enrolments at the level as a percentage of total secondary age population) is just 44%, or 21 percentage points below the global average (but four higher than the African sub-Saharan average), while the lower secondary ratio is just 47% (versus a global average of 82%). This means that significantly, less Nigerian youths are currently making it through basic education, which helps to explain the stubbornly low youth literacy rate.

It is disturbing that our oil rich country records the highest number of out of school children in the whole world, and that out of every five “out-of-school” children in the world, there is a Nigerian. This fact is certainly not a commendable testimonial for Nigeria. As a nation Nigerian need to sit up and invest more in the education sector, hence enjoin the international funding agencies to step up their financial commitments to nations that need the funds more critically. The regional disparities obviously challenge each of the geo-political zones to do a lot more to aim at 100% access and retention. It is necessary also for more research to be directed at discovering the underlying explanations for the regional disparities and for State Governments to utilize the research findings to improve the quality and quantity of education delivery in the Zones. Nigeria as a nation continue to strive to eliminate the gender disparities as revealed by the data. All socio-cultural factors that inhibit the girl-child’s education need to be completely eliminated in those parts of the country where such inhibitions still prevail. Not mere legislations but actual implementation of the legislations will be effective in achieving the purpose.

### **Professional Learning Tools for Literacy**

Though there is need for further development of validation tests and non-test tools, instruments have been developed for appraising, support and development of educational vocational and personal dimensions of student’s learning ,development and skills. Denga (1985) discussed the solutions and prospects of students counselling process to improve literacy level of the learners, as follows:

### **Conclusion**

Contemporary views of literacy have moved beyond simple print to encompass notions of active citizenship, new communications practices and information technologies, critical

thinking, linguistic and cultural diversity. Maximum program effectiveness with the presence of the counselor, who plays a critical role in the lives of the learner to enhance reading and write towards the leading and writing towards the learners as school counselling has undergone a transformation from a program of entitlement to one of performance and continuous improvement. By providing education, prevention, early the learners achieve academic, success and literacy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Then the question is what more does a child require to be inspired, committed and improved towards effective learning experience with the existing roles of the school counselor.

### Recommendations

Based on the conclusion upon the various roles performed by the counselor towards the development of literacy in the learners, the following recommendations are made:

1. The State and Federal Government should help the Counselors to help the students to make genuine inputs in terms of time, energy, attention, concentration and steadfastness, to remain focus as study involves work, the tendency of many students to run away is high.
2. Provision of appraisal tools for counselling by the school authorities.
3. The school authority should provision of adequate physical facilities for counselling the students.
- (d). There should be allotment of time in the school time table for counselling sessions between the counselors, the students and other personnel's within the school environment.
- (e). Sufficient funding for guidance activities and purchase of modern gadgets should be ensured by the State and Federal Government.
- (g). State and Federal Government should organize training and development for qualified counselor to obtain more knowledge and current information.

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