



GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING: A TOOL FOR PROMOTING NATIONAL INTEGRATION AND COHESION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract: *Nigeria is a developing country that is confronted with many diverse political, social, economic and religious challenges. There is urgent need to address these challenges to enable the country take her rightful place in the community of nations. One of the meaningful steps to address these challenges is to seek the place of guidance and counselling as a force in the educational enterprise. Today, Nigeria as a country is made up of different ethnic groups and cultures that constitute a threat to national integration and cohesion. It is against this background that this paper discusses the concept of guidance, counselling, integration, cohesion and the need for national integration and cohesion. Furthermore, the paper identified the challenges militating against national integration and cohesion and suggested relevant solutions.*

Key words: Guidance, Counselling, Integration, Cohesion and National Unity

Introduction

Guidance and counselling as a discipline was introduced in Nigeria in the 20th century as a pragmatic response to the political, social and economical challenges of the time. The fact is obvious that Nigeria is a country of diverse ethnic groups, cultures and multiplicity of languages. This has created a lot of problems in the Nigerian society ranging from political instability, tribal discrimination, imbalance in educational development, mutual distrust, greed, corruption, sectionalism, poverty, lack of patriotism and economic mismanagement. To this end, it becomes imperative for guidance and counselling to be introduced in the school system and the society at large to harmonize our differences to become productive, creative, self-reliant and appreciate the need for unity in diversity.

Guidance originated from the word 'guide' meaning to help, assist, watch over, direct, inform, steer, pilot, manage etc. Guidance is a broad concept in education designed to assist an individual to know his abilities, interest and personality traits, to develop them in order to achieve a state of complete life. In this sense, guidance is virtually related to every aspect of the school such as curriculum planning, methods of instruction, classroom management, leadership training and public relations (Eduwen, 2003). From the foregoing, guidance can be defined as a process of assisting individual to understand himself and his environment.

Concept of Counselling

In its simplest form, counselling is derived from the word 'counsel' meaning advice, consultation, discussion and suggestions. According to Olayinka (1993) counselling is a helping relationship aimed at assisting individuals to cope with life situations. It is a relationship of trust whereby the counsellor who is capable of being regarded as a special kind of teacher assists an individual to evaluate himself and his opportunities, make a feasible choice in the light of his unique characteristics and opportunities, accept responsibility for his choice and initiate a choice of action that is consonant with his choice.

In the view of Parrot (1997 as cited in Aluede et al, 2005) the most accurate definition of counseling could be what counsellors actually do, which involves the following:

1. having a personal commitment to help client
2. being given a certain degree of authority and thus inspiring faith and hope in clients;
3. acting as a mediator between suffering clients and the larger society
4. helping clients release emotions, rethink problems and restore morale simply by listening in an empathetic manner;
5. creating a framework for change by providing exploratory schemes that help clients understand the conflicts and pains, and
6. being actively involved in the process of change usually over a number of session.

Therefore, counselling is an interaction between trained personnel (the counsellor) and a troubled individual (the counsellee) for the purpose of helping the counsellee to resolve his problem(s) or crises. In this sense, everybody needs counselling, but not everybody can counsel, since counselling requires specialized skills which could be acquired through training and practice.

Principles of Guidance and Counselling

Guidance and counselling as a helping relationship is predicated on a number of principles to facilitate the realization of its objectives and effectiveness in the society. According to Olayinka and Omoegun (2002), the practice of guidance and counselling is based on ten principles as follows:

1. Guidance services are for all people. Counselling is for all to cope with life situations and decision making. Whenever the individual is faced with the complex problems of decision-making, there is need for guidance to attain adjustment.
2. Guidance services are voluntary and not by force or coercion. Clients should be encouraged to seek the assistance of counsellors out of free will rather than the use of force. Therefore, guidance should be seen as a cooperative effort between the counsellor and the counsellee.
3. Guidance services are primarily required to prevent problems rather than providing solutions. In essence, guidance services should be seen as preventive rather than curative.
4. Guidance services do not provide solution to all human problems. Clients having problems should be assisted by the counsellors to the best of their abilities but when such problems are beyond their services, they should be referred to other specialists for direct attention. Hence, counsellors should recognize their potentials and limitations.
5. Guidance services are for all school levels, right from primary to tertiary institutions. Appropriate counselling services and techniques are designed to meet the needs of students at the various educational levels.
6. Guidance services should be rendered on a continuous basis. As a person grows and develops, his needs, experiences, interest, aspirations and goals may also change, hence the need for counselling at different stages in life.
7. Guidance services may manipulate the environment to help the client. The counsellor should be able to explore the environment in seeking employment opportunities as well as securing scholarships to assist indigent students and citizens.
8. Guidance services are based on the total development of the individual (mentally, socially, emotionally, physically and in terms of his vocational aspirations). Hence, the development in terms of the three domains are emphasized in counselling in the cognitive, affective and psychomotor.
9. Guidance services should recognize the worth and dignity of the individual client. According to Carl Rogers, the four elements required for effective counselling are empathy, congruence, positive regard and unconditionality of regard. Guidance services are provided with the intention of effecting positive changes in the individual client, counsellors should therefore not condemn any client on the basis of his/her misbehavior or information received about him.
10. Confidentiality is about the most important principles in guidance and counselling. "keep our secret secret".

Guidance service must ensure the security and confidentiality of all personal information revealed by the client during the counselling relationship. A counsellor should not betray the trust and confidentiality which his client has reposed in him unless it is dangerous to do.

What is Integration and Cohesion?

There is no universally acceptable definition of integration and cohesion. According to Coleman (1996) integration is the process whereby a distinctive racial, cultural or religious minority group merges with and is accepted by the dominant group within a society without fundamentally changing its and/or their own way of life giving rise to a multicultural society.

Dashen (2001) asserted that the concept of national integration and cohesion presupposes the notion of people coming together in a geographical and political expression with the aim of maximizing the use of their resources for the good of all. This presupposes a progress towards better economic, social, religious and political integration.

Cohesion on the other hand is a state of coming together in unity. This state of togetherness implies putting aside the different forces of disunity and embracing one destiny for national survival.

Justification for National Integration and Cohesion in Nigeria

It is an obvious fact that Nigeria is a country of diverse ethnic groups and multiplicity of languages. There is therefore the need to harmonize these diverse elements into one distinct entity for national coexistence. Alli (2001) supported this position when he posited that the issues of national cohesion and integration are important because of the following reasons:

1. Without forging much greater cohesion at all levels we cannot use even one-tenth or one percent of all our resources to improve the miserable living conditions of our people.
2. We cannot build the social, economic and political foundations on which to promote and defend our dignity and independence and indeed our survival as one country.

Supporting this position, Dimka (2001) highlighted the reasons why integration is necessary and important in Nigeria as follows:

1. The heterogeneous nature of the country requires integration
2. The need for peace and unity among the various cultural groups is a basis for living in harmony with one another.
3. There is no society that is self-sufficient. There is therefore the need for interdependence among societies, groups and individuals.
4. The need for specialization. All the parts that make whole cannot be the same thing at the same time, so some people specializes in doing one thing while others specializes in doing another. By so doing, human beings complements the efforts of each other.
5. The laws of Nigeria i.e. the constitution permit citizens to live freely and own property in any part of the country.

Akinjide (2011) asserted that though from all indications, the society is getting more complex as individuals either on religious ground, ethnic sentiment or the invocation of tradition have had to bring up more problems in addition to the existing ones. While Nigeria has been trying to cope with the problems of corruption, human rights abuse, human trafficking, ethno-religious crises, terrorist activities, and insurrection in Niger Delta Region as a result of the demands for resource control, many other problems are daily raising their heads. It looks more of an unhealthy development within the Nigeria political landscape, a situation which comes to confirm that “the whole region (country) is clearly split into many divided selves”.

Mustapha (2006) in his discussion of ethnic factor in Nigerian politics states that fear has been constant in every tension and confrontation in political Nigeria. Not the political fear of violence, not the spiritual fear of retribution, but the psychological fear of discrimination, of domination. It is the fear of not getting one’s fair share, one’s desert.

Challenges Associated with the Achievement of National integration and Cohesion in Nigeria

A number of challenges are associated with the achievement of national integration and cohesion in Nigeria as follows:

- i. There is political instability in the country which often leads to religious and ethnic crisis and violence that have resulted into many loses of lives of innocent souls.
- ii. There is imbalance in educational development between the North and South that have resulted into mutual distrust and discrimination.

- iii. The multiplicity of languages that have created communication gap among citizens and hinders the adoption of one indigenous lingua franca for the nation.
- iv. There is generally lack of an acceptable national ideology by the Nigerians, which is a force of disintegration and threat to national unity.
- v. The present formula of revenue generation from national resources of the land is a source of discord and dissatisfaction among the petroleum producing states.
- vi. There are series of complaint of marginalization and discrimination in power sharing and appointment of citizens into key offices and boards.
- vii. General lack of trust and confidence in political leaders as a result of corruption, selfishness and nepotism.
- viii. Nigerian masses are disenchanted as a result of poverty, epileptic power supply, frequent increase in the price of petroleum products, increasing cases of armed robbery, kidnapping and cultism in our school system.

These constitutes impediments to national integration and cohesion. According to Usman (1987) as cited by Alli (2002), the problems facing the building of national integration and cohesion are:

- a. Religionism and statism
- b. Poverty
- c. Lack of education, ignorance
- d. Uneven economic development
- e. The undermining of the ethos of justice and equality for all Nigerians
- f. Constitutional weakness
- g. Quality of the political class
- h. Ethnicity
- i. Manipulation of religion
- j. Issues of fair and just political representation, sectionalism etc
- k. Lack of historical consciousness and patriotism
- l. Gross economic mismanagement and corruption, greed, prevailing cultural conditions.

Guidance and Counselling as a Tool in Promoting National Integration and Cohesion in Nigeria

One of the ways guidance and counselling can be used as a tool for national integration and cohesion is through leadership and citizenship training. Thus, guidance and counselling practitioners should focus attention on equipping students with skills and capabilities of becoming responsible future leaders and integrated citizens to enhance national integration and cohesion.

Guidance and counselling in schools is a vital tool for eradicating ignorance, illiteracy and misinformation that are imperative for national integration and cohesion. Counselling services is for all and must be extended to members of the school system and the society as a whole in order to achieve national unity. Counselling programmes mounted in schools and different institutions of higher learning emphasizes moral discipline, commitment to studies, industry and loyalty to constituted authorities. These are veritable ingredients for national integration and cohesion in Nigeria in view of the fact that political education is fostered among students who are leaders of tomorrow.

There is need to redesign the guidance and counselling curriculum in relation to the economic, social, political and cultural diversities in the country and fast-track the implementation to foster national ideology and patriotism among students which are instrument to national integration and cohesion. These services provided for students inculcate in the spirit of consciousness, tolerance in the face of provocation, political socialization, self-reliance, and trust for leaders in authority.

The fact is obvious that politician have always tempted to form a class of elites to separate themselves from the larger society. Where this happens, there must be need for proper guidance and counselling for them through political education and adequate enlightenment campaign that would effect a total transformation in their character and attitudes so that they would realize that power belongs to the people and they have a right to determine their destiny.

Political leadership demands sound educational training, administrative skills and competence and managerial acumen that are virtues which can be acquired from systematic guidance and counselling programmes through training in seminars, workshops and conferences.

Nigeria need to evolve a sound political arrangement that aim at social stability, economic emancipation, religious tolerance, security, national integration and cohesion through rational power sharing in the legislative, executive and judiciary arms of government. In this case, this vision can only be realized through a well articulated guidance and counselling programme that should be made available to vast majority of Nigerians in schools, colleges and the society as a whole.

Conclusion

In this paper, attention has been drawn to the concept of guidance and counselling , national integration and cohesion. Attempts were made to highlight the challenges associated with the achievement of national integration and cohesion. Obviously, it is not in doubt that Nigeria as a country is balkanized by diverse economic, social and political forces that can be harmonized to attain national integration and cohesion through effective counselling programmes that would unfold to the citizens the benefits of unity in diversity.

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