

PROFESSIONAL COUNSELLING SERVICES: A VERITABLE TOOL FOR NATIONAL INTEGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Professional counselling services assist in the total transformation of society making humanity the focus of development drive and seeking to develop man's potentialities in totality. It inculcates the desirable values, norms, attitudes approved by the society in order to have good citizens who can live harmoniously for the general development of the nation. This paper examined various forms of professional counselling services such as human resources development, rehabilitation and behavioural change counselling among others that can foster national integration and development. It was recommended among others that injustice must be eliminated to create harmony of co-existence and cooperation, youths should learn to identify pride in self-worth regardless of race, colour or creed, dialogue and eventual consensus in conflict resolution must be learnt from childhood to eradicate violent adults.

Keywords: *Professional counselling services, National integration and Development*

Introduction

Counselling is an interactional process meant to enhance redefinition of stand for positive adjustment on all issues of life. It is an in-depth interaction between the professional counselor and the counsellee that focuses basically on areas of nurturing and healing emotionality, problems management, decision making, crises management including support and life skills training. Egbochuku (2008) defines counselling as a facilitative two way collaborative exchange of ideas with a supportive relationship that enables clients to explore their problems. From the above, it can be seen that counselling is always to assist in better understanding of oneself and environment in relation to the present and future problems. Unprecedented economic and social changes have over the years changed the ways in which we manage our lives. Unfortunately, not all people can effectively deal with the challenges of modern times. Thus, the need for professional counselling services becomes paramount in order to promote the well being of people. Effective counselling services should help to improve the self-image of people and facilitate achievement in life tasks (Egbochuku, 2007). It should empower youth to participate fully and benefit from the economic and social development of the nation to foster national integration.

Nigerian youths have multifarious and complex needs which must be met if they are to have all round development and adjustment. These needs include educational, emotional, social and

psychological which must be met at all times. Adegoke (2016) expressed that the youths needs include attaining individuality, making progress toward an organized personality pattern, developing philosophy of life, developing understanding of personal assets and liabilities, establishing learning to be independent from parent, learning to adjust to changes resulting from socio-economic situations amongst others. Professional counselling services is the only helping profession for the achievement of academic excellence as well as the adaptive behaviour needed for national integration. Quality education is not just the acquisition of knowledge but the acquisition of the art of utilization of the knowledge. In essence quality education is the process of acquiring knowledge and ideas that shape and condition man attitudes, actions and achievement. According to Akong and Onete (2015) quality education is a process of developing the child's moral, physical, emotional and intellectual power for his contribution in social change.

Education may construct or destroy a nation depending on the utilization and application of the acquired knowledge. In Athenian democracy, education is used for intellectual development. In Japan, it is used as an instrument for cultivation of benevolence, justice, propriety, intelligence and fidelity. Germans used education as instrument for national unity (Okolo, 2013). In Nigeria, one of the five main cardinal national objectives as stated in the second national development plan of the 70s and which has been endorsed as the necessary foundation for the national policy on education is the building of a united, strong and self-reliant nation. Thus, it can be deduced that education is seen as instrument for national unity, loyalty and national integration.

Conceptual Clarifications

National Integration

National integration is the incorporation of disparate ethnic or religious elements of the population into a unified society, providing equality of opportunity for all members of that society. In such a society, an individual's attainment of education, access to any public or private facility, opportunity for employment, and ownership of property are neither denied nor limited by reason of race, religion or national origin. Olaitan, Christiana and Ajibola (2014) defined national integration as a process as well as a goal by which all the people inhabiting in a particular territory irrespective of their religion, ethnic and linguistic differences on the basis of shared traditions, experiences, common history and values strive to live together forever with honour and dignity. This definition underscores process and goal of different communities who live together harmoniously by forging a common identity that is shared by all; emphasizing the commonalities that we share, such the love for justice, peace, security, prosperity, values, world view, laws among other things.

Unfortunately, there is problem befalling our national integration which is so prevalent in Nigeria that the existence of many of her facets as viable national entities is subject to doubt. Ujomu (2006) submitted that the persistent national discord and instability renders meaningless the numerous attempts to find lasting solutions to the problems that pervade Nigerian society such as poverty, pestilence, illiteracy, inadequate social infrastructure, poor health, unemployment and political disenfranchisement. All these and more make difficult the building of structures for solving these problems on solid ground. There are clearly new and alternate threats to internal and national security in Nigeria (Ako and James, 2018). The nation therefore needs to brace up since it is challenged from a plethora of perspectives. The nation is challenged within its core by

factionalism and syndicated conspiracy against authority, sabotage of national interest, elite power struggles, class collusion for corruption, failed or impotent agencies. The nation is further challenged by forces in the wider society such as closed ideological communities, covert criminal syndicates, countervailing cultic ethno-religious cosmologies, generally hostile and apathetic citizens. These and others not mentioned in this paper jeopardized national development.

National Development

A developed nation can be described as a nation in which the citizens have access to social amenities that will improve their well-being. The main characteristics of a developed nation are high income per capita, high human development index, tranquility in the environment, high gross domestic product, more produce and trade in consumer goods, more energy consumption and very high literacy level. Nigeria is often described as a developing country because of the absence of many indices of development like infrastructure, access to quality education and medical facilities, insecurity, high rate of poverty to mention but few. According to Adeyera (2011), national development is the establishment of a viable and buoyant national economy, the establishment of a just and egalitarian society, the enthronement of equity and social justice and the building of a unified and integrated society where the different ethnics, religious and geo-political identities develop a collective sense of imagination that they are one.

National development as submitted by Emeh and Ogaboh (2010) involves the total transformation of society making humanity the focus of the development drive and seeking to develop man's potentialities in a total sense. It includes reduction of poverty, wealth creation, equitable distribution of wealth, ensuring nutrition and health, housing and auxiliary services, social security and welfare. From the above, it can be deduced that national development is an all embracing entity on the part of individual and societal change with such indications as quality food, gainful employment, and wealth creation, power reduction within the ambit of such framework as equality, dignity, social justice and equity. Thus a nation cannot be said to have developed when a significant percent of her population are not literate and there is decay in the country's educational system. National development must therefore route for change in all areas of culture which include economy, technology and environmental serenity in such a way that the physical and mental abilities of the citizenry are being positioned to achieve beneficial change. This paper therefore attempt to examine how quality education can foster national integration and also ex-rays how professional counseling services can assist in national integration.

Educational Policies and National Integration

The first educational policy to be used in Nigeria from independence was made by the Ashby Commission. An outstanding attempt made by this commission towards national integration was the recommendation to balance the education structure between the north and the south in order to diffuse the already rising tension over the imbalances in educational opportunities between the north and the south (Nnoh, 2011). Another noteworthy recommendation of the commission towards national integration was the establishment of unity schools which was based on the commission's recognition and conviction that in bringing students of one ethnic group into contact with members of other ethnic groups would foster tolerance and mutual understanding thus checking to some extent inter-ethnic differences among the educated youths.

Inter-Ethnic Mixing and National Integration

To facilitate inter ethnic mixing and national integration, the federal government in 1973 under the leadership of General Yakubu Gowon introduced the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) in which universities, colleges of education and polytechnic graduates are to serve the nation for one year in states other than their states of origin (Abekhale, 2009). The service was later limited to 1st degree and HND holders only. This programme can aptly be said to have engendered the spirit of loyalty to the nation, development in the participants' positive attitudes through shared experience towards mobilization in national interest, developed common ties among the corp members and members of the community in which they served. Etuk (2013) submitted that employers of labour have through this programme employed qualified Nigerians irrespective of their states of origin. Ejiogu (2013) expressed that many youths were exposed to areas which they never thought existed as part of the country. They were forced to adjust to the condition of the environment they served, learnt the language of the community to ease their interaction with the people. Cases abound where corps members got married in the community they served, thus creating opportunity for inter-ethnic marriage which is a strong force in the harmonization of ethnic differences.

Sports and National integration

All Nigeria Universities Games (NUGA), Nigeria Colleges of Education Games (NICEGA) among others have served as avenues for inter-ethnic mixing. Students were not left behind in harmonizing ethnic differences in Nigeria. For instance in 1962 some students of the University of Ife founded the palm wine drinkers club (palmate club), the aim of which was to use palm wine as a symbol to harmonize cultural differences in Nigeria, promote mutual understanding, unity and oneness among members irrespective of tribe, region or political differences. 'GYRATIONS' organized by members always attracted the migration of students from other schools, thereby enhancing inter-ethnic mixing (Opara, 2007). The above efforts are no longer yielding expected results because of the present state of the country' security ranging from Boko haram insurgent in the North, Niger Delta Militants in the South and series of cult group rivalry in the West. Apart from the above each state of the federation stands as its own entity and not recognizing other sister states as part of them when it comes to employment and other benefits. For example a Kano man can only be given contract appointment in Katsina because permanent appointment is reserved only for the indigenes of that state and vice versa.

Professional Counseling Services Intervention in ensuring National Integration

1. **Rehabilitation and behaviour change counselling:** This is geared towards a total overhaul of the individuals' behaviours in both the public and private sectors through moral orientation with particular emphasis on good governance by the executive, legislative and judicial arms of the government. Orientate followers on the need to respect constituted authority, abide by the rules and regulations governing organization's activities and obey the hierarchical structure of an organization by following due process (Onuchie, 2012).
2. **Human Development Initiatives:** Counselling plays a very vital role in the overall development of individuals in all spheres of life. Human development can assist in national integration through collaborative activities with government and non-governmental organization on good education system, good health care system, motivation of workers,

schemes Child development and Protection Project, Youth Development Projects, Women Empowerment Projects and Social Re-orientation Programmes.

3. **Organized Guidance and Counselling Services:** Such services in educational establishment extend for the purpose of career development, eradication of youth restiveness, cultism, examination malpractices, improvement of self-concept, academic performance and self-esteem among target clients. This can also be adapted to suit non school settings because national integration is about revamping of the whole governance philosophy of the country.
4. **Moral Education and National Integration:** Morality provides ethical principles that safeguard the right of the individual in the society and points out to his reciprocal duties and responsibilities. Invariably, there is justice, freedom and social order from the contents of morality which can foster national integration. According to Agbo (2014) morality is a medium of regulating human interpersonal behaviour. It is an emanation of man overriding desire to preserve social harmony by ensuring that moral codes discourage aggression, injustice, deceit and anarchy in any social order.
5. **Capacity Building and Enhancement:** Services can be rendered in form of workshops/conferences for personnel such as teachers, para-counsellors, child and youth development officers, social workers, mental health workers, personnel management officers and the likes for improving their skills on human relations management, guidance and counselling, peace and harmony reinforcement in organizations.
6. **Action Research and Training in Research Skills:** There is the need for training and retraining of personnel in order to instill desired thinking and discipline which will pave the way for achieving national integration. Professional counsellors would be of immense assistance in carrying out such researches and proffering solutions for such.
7. **Personnel and Human Capacity Research:** Personnel and human capacity are always the bedrock on which organization and administration is entrenched for enhancement of productivity in all organized work settings in both private and public sectors. Recruitments, promotions or project development, must be based on facts made feasible through research and findings by counsellors in order to ensure comprehensive information on both overt and covert behaviour expected of human being.
8. **Peace Mediation:** The key element of national integration is peace. If given the logistics required, counsellors are capable of assisting the nation in overcoming security challenges through interventions in families, neighbourhood, communities and organizations in terms of conflict and crisis resolution.
9. **Legal aid mitigation and outreaches for prospective clients:** Achieving greater independence for the judiciary, eliminating all forms of corruption in the administration of justice and improving professionalism are key factors in national integration. Through proper guidance and sensitization clients will easily know where to take and how best to tackle concerned issues. Counsellors can act as liaison personnel through which people can get desired legal services. This can be done through referral services.
10. **Assessing Programmes and Policies Impacts:** Follow-up is an aspect that is deeply entrenched in guidance and counselling services involving visiting of institutions and employments to find out how well the objective national integration is achieved. Monitoring and Evaluation of programmes is an essential component of national integration. It is a veritable tool for tracking developments in policy and programme performance. It attempts

to measure inputs, outputs, outcomes and the impact of policies, programmes and projects of government on the economic and welfare of the citizenry.

Conclusion

There has been an increase in the occurrence of acts of violence and lawlessness, including hostage taking of prominent citizens and expatriates, high rate of oil bunkering, insurgencies, cultism in every part of the country. It is obvious that shortfalls of students' education on national integration and national security in Nigeria are seen mainly in the inability of the various governments and the state agencies to consistently and institutionally moderate the conduct of the youths in view of civilized conduct. This situation has bred cadres of individuals and groups in different sectors of national life, who share the common value of engaging in conduct inimical to their fellows. Given the current attempt to resist and unseat the state and other institutions as centers of dominant influence, power and protection, thus professional counselling services would be of great assistance in rebuilding the nation to foster national integration.

Suggestions

The problems with national integration which led to security challenges emanated from lack of proper professional counselling services. The following recommendations were put forward:

1. Injustice, especially on youths, less privileged and minorities must be eliminated to create harmonious relationship. This will foster national integration and curtail insecurity challenges in the country.
2. The concept of interdependence must be understood right from the family unit and extended to the community the wider world. The ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a cultural diverse democratic system in an interdependent world would enhance national integration.
3. Provision of right education/training for youth will ensure the possession of a stable skill suitable for youth to enhance youth participation in social orderliness and national development.
4. Research shows that those who grew up under a corrupt system tend to be corrupt. Therefore all leaders at various levels like associations and organizations, including teachers, public office holders, politicians and parents should lead by example.
5. Moral education should be introduced as a compulsory course/subject from primary to tertiary institution in order to inculcate moral values, character and civil responsibility into students to foster national integration.

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