

GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING ROLES IN ENHANCING SUSTAINABLE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT GOALS AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN THIS COVID-19 PANDEMIC

By

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Abstract

This paper examined the roles of guidance and counselling in enhancing sustainable national development goals among secondary school students in this COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria. The concepts of guidance and counselling as well as its importance in this period of COVID-19 were discussed. The paper equally highlighted how COVID-19 came in to Nigeria. This paper equally discussed the concepts of sustainable development as well as the national development goals. The roles of guidance and counselling in enhancing sustainable development through vocational guidance and counselling education were also discussed. Conclusions and recommendations were made among which are vocational guidance and counselling rehabilitation and recreational centres should be set up in various secondary schools and communities where counselling services should be obtained in Nigeria.

Keywords: COVID-19, Pandemic, Guidance, Counselling, Sustainable Development

Introduction

Guidance and Counselling are among the essential aspects of every human life. Guidance and Counselling start right from the very beginning of childhood. Although both guidance and counselling are used interchangeably, both the terms have slight differences. Guidance is a process of helping individuals through their own efforts to discover and develop their potentialities both for personal happiness and social usefulness. Counselling, on the other hand, is the soul of the guidance programme and the wheel upon which guidance rotates (Egbo, 2015).

Guidance is a more comprehensive term. It is the assistance provided to an individual to manage her/his life's activities. Counselling is a more specific service. It is provided by an expert to an individual facing some kind of trouble in her/his life. Guidance can be provided by many agencies and organizations like parents, teachers, family members, community or society as a whole. Counselling is provided by some expert in the field. Guidance is preventive while counselling is curative. "The former refers to helping students' whole-person development, while the latter is frequently targeted at helping students with problems" (Lai-Yeung, 2013).

Although guidance and counselling services are vital for everyone in every situation, however, its importance got multifold in the present scenario of COVID-19 pandemic. The world is going through a crisis. The student community is facing some real challenges in

continuing education from home. The uncertainty prevailed in the education and employment sector is leading to higher and higher cases of depression and suicides among youth.

Among different professions, students and healthcare professionals were found to experience stress, anxiety, and depression more than others (Rehman, 2020). In such situations, guidance and counselling can be of great help for the students of every level to overcome those challenges of education. However, during this crisis time, face to face or real-time guidance and counselling services are almost impossible to avail, so the virtual or online guidance and counselling programs came into being.

The role of guidance and counselling services in the school system cannot be overemphasized. Guidance and Counselling services have always played a leading role in terms of child's development and improvement. For this reason, Guidance and Counselling services are sine qua non to child's development. According to Modo; Sanni; Uwah and Mogbo (2013) Guidance and Counselling is one of the educational services that promote the effectiveness of the educational system for goals attainment and guiding learners through the learning process. This is in line with the goals of educational services as contained in the National Policy of Education (2009) which are to facilitate the implementation of the educational policy; the attainment of policy goals and the promotion of effectiveness of educational system; and make learning experiences more meaningful for children. Okobiah and Okorodudu (2006) highlighted that Guidance and Counselling is encompassed by activities of relevant services and also processes of helping persons within and outside the school, to achieve their full potentialities in their emotional, moral, social, academic and vocational developments.

According to Oguzie (2014), he says that guidance and counselling is aimed primarily at assisting the receiver to discover his own hidden strengths and ultimately grow in independence and ability to take his own decisions, make choices or adjustments unaided. Furthermore Nwachuku (2007) summarizes the definition of guidance and counselling as Research on Humanities and Social Sciences as, a systematic and organized educational helping service, professionally given by a professionally trained counsellor or therapists to a learner of any age, within or outside the school walls at appropriate level. Secondary school students today are facing a complex and rapidly changing society because of the situation they found themselves in this of COVID-19. In spite of all efforts being put forth by schools and government agencies, an increasing large proportion of these students have and will continue to experience difficulty in making transition from the world of school to the world of work in this COVID-19. The essence is to assist them understand themselves, situation and environment, discover their interests, potentialities and opportunities in life and learn how best to effectively utilize their assets as well as minimize their weaknesses, to live a maximum productive life irrespective of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The need for guidance and counselling is paramount in promoting the wellbeing of an individual as well as groups of people who need to be guided in their interactions in terms of health and the environment, acquiring skills, knowledge, attitudes, just to mention a few. All these can result in emotional strain which impacts individuals' adjustment to life in this outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic. In order to survive in new environment, students must take responsibility for their actions. Counsellors in secondary schools play an essential role in helping students meet the challenge of this world's outbreak of this corona virus crisis with their leading wealth of knowledge-based in schools, homes and society at large. The transition to secondary school after the COVID-19 for many students has the potential to be stressful

requiring the student to make significant adjustments to their personal, social and academic lives. The goal of guidance and counselling is to promote development of the whole individual in order to ensure the student flourishes in their total wellbeing (Tuchili & Ndhlov, 2017). Goal-directed behaviour is thus essential for every human being.

Origin of COVID 19 Pandemic

Although the origin of the pandemic are so controversial, some scientists say that it is likely that COVID 19 originated in bats. They also say that based on their experience with other outbreaks such as Ebola, Lassa Fever, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), Tuberculosis (TB) as well as our long history of malaria and HIV. The scientific consensus is that COVID 19 has a natural origin meaning that it has been proved to have originated from animals to human beings. The novel human corona virus disease (COVID 19) has become the fifth documented pandemic following malaria, TB, Ebola and Lassa fever/HIV. The term coronavirus itself refers to an extensive classification of viruses, which cause infections of the sinuses, nose and the upper throat. The name 'Coronavirus' was derived from the fact that the virus has a similar appearance to a crown, when observed under a microscope while the vast majority of coronavirus pose a little threat to human life the newly identified COVID-19 can be deadly.

Madhav, Oppenheim, Gallivan, Mulembakani, Rubin, & Wolfe (2017) stated that Corona virus are viruses that belong to the pathogenic family of influenza, filovirus (such as Ebola virus), flavivirus (such as Zika virus) that have caused epidemics and pandemics due to the fact that they are ribonucleic acids that have high mutation rates. They also unleash what is generally referred to as severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) hence it is sometimes referred to as SARS-COV. Furthermore, they posited that because they are pathogenic organisms that have high rate of mutation they pose great health risk to the society. They are therefore biological microorganisms that are responsible for the spread of the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and which in most cases exert severe complication on the respiratory system.

According to Puck (2020) as the Corona-Virus (COVID-19) pandemic spreads globally thousands of deaths have forced decision makers to cancel sporting events, restrict international travels as well as discourage common social interactions. Furthermore, he submitted that the above development has led governments of nations to demand that people self-quarantine themselves and this he noted is currently disrupting the daily lives of people. Moreover, he noted that while industries, businesses and financial institutions, markets are being put in disarray, our traditionally long held social values like hugging and shaking hands are being sanctioned because of fear of transmitting the virus.

According to Madhav, Oppenheim, Gallivan, Mulembakani, Rubin, & Wolfe (2017) there are three theories that relates to pandemics threats in the modern world namely the pathogenic, the spark and spread risks as well the bio- terrorism theories. They noted that pandemics have occurred throughout history and appear to be on the increase due to rise in viral pathogenic diseases from animals. Furthermore, they posited that the spread risk theory relates to the influence of globalization which has ushered an age of increased global travel, integration, urbanization and greater exploitation of the natural environment. Moreover, they stated that bio-terrorism which has to do with the use of chemical weapon may also be a possible source.

Pandemics have been defined by Madhav et al (2017) as a large scale outbreaks of infectious disease that can engender disease or even death on a wide geographic area resulting in significant economic, social and political disruption. The Chambers Dictionary (2000) defined the above word as an epidemic that covers a wide area, a wide spread epidemic or one affecting whole people. On the other hand, an online English Dictionary defines pandemic as a disease that hits a wide geographical area and affects a large proportion of the population. From the foregoing the above word as used in this context refers to Corona virus as a great threat to the lives, health, economy and overall wellbeing of the global community.

Importance of Guidance and Counselling in COVID 19 Pandemic

Firstly, and most importantly, the students are under depression due to the uncertainty prevailed in every aspect of life. They are unsure about their education, employment opportunities, etc. due to the disruption in their studies. In such a situation, the cases of depression at the global level are on a high rise. According to a survey published in The Economic Times (12 Aug 2020), conducted by International Labour Organization, 50% of young people across the world are possibly subject to anxiety or depression, while 17% are probably affected by it. Also, there is a sharp decline in employment opportunities due to the pandemic, which is resulting in increasing depression and suicides among teens and youths. In such an ongoing crisis, there is a need to keep a check on the mental well-being of youth. By providing counselling sessions, the stress, anxiety and depression of the students can be managed to some extent, if not completely removed.

Secondly, with the ongoing shutdown of academic institutions, schools and colleges are forced to switch to technology in order to not affect the education of the students. Those students who are from the lower socioeconomic background are new to it and find it difficult to keep pace with the technology. In such cases, there is a kind of disruption in their education, which ultimately is leading to anxiety and depression. According to the same ILO survey report published in The Economic Times (12 Aug 2020), young people whose education or work has either disrupted or stopped completely are almost twice as likely to be affected by depression and anxiety as compared to those whose work or education has not affected. The report also added that about 73% of youths who were either studying or combining study and work before the onset of the crisis, experienced school closures though all of them were not able to transition into online and distance learning. Thus, in such a situation, it is important to acquaint such students with the use of various software and applications used in online education by providing guidance and counselling services.

Lastly, the pandemic has brought the world to a halt. People are stuck in their places. In such circumstances, the students' exposure to the outside world has also been affected. They are skeptical about their future with respect to the opportunities available in furthering their education and getting employment. So, the responsibility of making them aware of the opportunities available in the education as well as the employment sector has been shifted to the guidance and counselling programs. They need to be kept up-to-date with the latest developments in the education and job market in order to keep them away from the shadows of hopelessness and pessimism.

The Concept of Sustainable Development and National Development Goals

Sustainable development has been defined by many in various ways. Adebola (2007) defined sustainable development as a kind of development that can be initiated and managed properly in such a way as to give attention to continuity and preservation as people explore an explicit available resources for the enlargement of their existence. Ugoh (2008) described sustainable development as a construct, which envision development as meeting the need of the present generation without compromising the needs of the future generation. Osuafor (2010) posited that for development to be sustained there must be human development. According to Arogundade (2011) the major essential tool for achieving sustainable development should include,

- (1) Improving the quality of basic education
- (2) Reorienting existing education programme to address sustainable development.
- (3) Developing public awareness and understanding, and
- (4) Providing training for all sectors of private and civil society.

Ugoh further argued that continued sustainable development is only possible or assured when concrete steps are taken to make the youth acquire skills that will enable them to be self-reliant and therefore become the tools for achieving development and its sustainability.

UNESCO (2002) alludes to Education for Sustainable Development as a process which prepares people of all walks of life to plan for, cope with and find solutions for issues that threaten the sustainability of our planet. According to UNESCO, understanding and addressing the global issues of sustainability that affect individual nations and communities are at the heart of Education for Sustainable Development. UNESCO further explains that these issues come from the three spheres of Sustainable Development, which are: Environment, Society and Economy. It should be observed that environmental issues like water and waste affect every nation, as do social issues like employment, human rights gender equity, peace and human security. In addition, we should affirm that every nation wants to improve the livelihood of its people by addressing political and economic issues such as poverty reduction and other major concerns and challenges like HIV and AIDS pandemic, migrations, urbanisation, and refugees, which have grabbed global attention.

The Nations of the World therefore, through the United Nations General Assembly adopted the resolution to establish a Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD), whose objectives were to facilitate needs and networking among stakeholders in Education for Sustainable Development, to foster increased quality of teaching in Education for Sustainable Development, and to develop strategies at every level to strengthen capacity in Education for Sustainable Development (UNESCO 2002). The UNESCO module on guidance and counselling (2002) also posited that Guidance is a programme of services to individuals based on their needs and the influence of environmental factors. Guidance and counselling is a professional field which has a broad range of activities, programmes and services geared toward assisting individuals to understand themselves, their problems, their school environment and their world and also to develop adequate capacity for making wise choices and decisions. As explained by Mubanga (2014), the need for counselling services today could be due to the ever- growing complexity of the society and people have to learn how to cope with the upcoming challenges.

The unprecedented expansion of educational institutions and first generation learners create a number of psychological problems that are personal, vocational and social. Guidance

and counselling plays a vital role in preventing educational, personal, social, mental emotional and other similar problems among secondary school students. Ministry of education and principals of secondary schools are aware of the heavy reliance placed on guidance and counselling services. These services are presented by Nwachukwu (2007) as information services, placement services, appraisal services, vocational guidance services, counselling services, referral services, evaluation, follow-up, consultancy and research services. As a vital component of any type and any level of education the absence of non utilization of these services in the present day secondary school system has led to the unprecedented rise in the crime wave, violence among students, severe value erosion, wrong career choice, and wrong subject combination among other issues.

Mutie and Ndambuki (2014) asserted that counselling service is the brain and heart of the guidance programme. Thus counselling represents a part of the total process of guidance which is helping individuals, achieve the self- understanding and self- direction necessary to make the maximum adjustment in a particular environment. In a democratic country like Nigeria every citizen has to play a pivotal role in the upliftment of the nation.

Therefore, it is generally agreed that a citizen must be educated in such a way that it would develop certain desirable life skills, attitudes and values in him for manifestation of his own self as well as for the progress of the nation. It may enrich his intellectual and social skills helpful to lead a purposeful and successful life. Life skills based education helps students understand themselves, their friends and their world. Effective counselling services need to be based on a complete understanding and acceptance of students experiences (Mutie &Ndambuki, 2014). Therefore, all students would require counselling services in order to develop their academic, vocational, social and personal competencies. Effective counselling will enable them to deal with psychological problems they may experience and make rational decisions on how to solve or cope with the academic, vocational, social and personal challenges. It helps an individual to acquire skills and attitudes, which make him or her properly adjusted person in life situations.

On the other hand, following the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, Nigeria began to implement the SNDGs almost immediately. First, it established institutional frameworks at the national and sub-national levels to support effective implementation. With this early head start, several strategic initiatives were implemented between 2016 and now, while others are still ongoing (The Sustainable Development Goals Center for Africa, 2020). Nevertheless, just as Nigeria commenced the ‘Decade of Action’ for the SNDGs in January 2020, the outbreak of COVID-19 took place, thus challenging the prospects of achieving the SNDGs in Nigeria. This Report examines the impact of COVID-19 on specific SNDGs. It would be recalled that Nigeria recorded its first index case on 27 February 2020. Despite measures taken by the federal and state governments to curtail the spread of the pandemic across the country, its adverse impact on socio-economic development and other consequences will last beyond 2020 (SDGCA, 2020).

Expectedly, the most significant impacts of COVID-19 have been on the Nigerian economy and the health system. Pre-COVID-19, in 2019, the health sector received only 25 per cent of its funding requirements, putting a strain on the coping capacity of the ‘country’s health systems (WHO, 2020). Funding is now shifting towards COVID-19, leaving other healthcare needs to suffer a further reduction in funding allocation. Federal and state governments, as well as development partners and organized private sector, have stepped up

efforts to increase the financing of the health sector. The inauguration of the Presidential Task Force on COVID-19 and the establishment of the fiscal stimulus package are steps in the right direction. The Federal government has secured life insurance for all frontline health workers participating in the ongoing fight against the spread of COVID-19 in Nigeria and cash transfers have been extended to over 10-million Nigerians, using the existing database within the National Social Investment Office (NSIO) (OECD, 2020).

Meanwhile, the socio-economic uncertainties and disruptions come at a substantial cost to an economy that is mainly dependent on oil and gas revenues, which have plummeted. Some of the most effective ‘social vaccines’ against COVID-19 are restrictive suppression response interventions, such as lockdowns, which however disproportionately impact on the poor and their livelihoods. The provision of timely and adequate palliatives to the poor and vulnerable members of the society will ease tension and prevent social unrest while the country is locked down to overcome the virus (Singh, 2020).

COVID-19 and the Sustainable National Development Goals (SNDGs)

Global phenomena that represent a core focus of the SNDGs have been significantly altered, drawing our attention to new realities and ways of life we did not imagine before. Mobility and migration are heavily affected through lockdown measures with significant human and economic costs in Nigeria. In Nigeria as a country, according to Kiangoi, (2020), the pandemic has triggered an economic crisis of large proportions with augmented impact, putting a large number of people in poverty, for the first time in three decades, poverty is increasing. The economic consequences are significant and widespread, affecting all areas of Nigerian economy, including capital flows, business operations, employment and jobs. Education is forcefully digitalized, impacting over 1.2 billion learners in over 170 countries (72% of all learners) during the initial lockdown (Soto, Moszoro & Pico, 2020).

Moreover, the decreasing trend in democratic government conduct is accentuated as states of emergency were imposed during the first wave and are recently reinstated as the second wave of the pandemic is emerging. Many of the above global trends pre-date COVID-19, being accentuated as the pandemic progresses, including digitalization, authoritarian and extreme right tendencies, and growing global inequality (Singh, 2020). We were already behind on reaching the Sustainable National Development Goals (SNDGs) before the COVID-19 pandemic started. In essence, the pandemic is bringing tension at a global level by giving on the one hand reasons for closing borders, restricting the movement of people and goods, and authoritarian actions, while on the other hand requiring global collaboration for tackling the pandemic, which is inherently global (Kiangoi, 2020).

In terms of positive consequences, the multilateral system is enhanced by the pressures for collaboration brought by the pandemic. Additionally, advancements in digitalization and consolidation of health, educational and social services will bring long-term benefits. From an environmental perspective, limited mobility brings improvements in air quality and decreases CO₂ emissions, having positive consequences, at least in the short term. Although somewhat contradictory, the SNDGs in the COVID-19 context guide and encourage mitigating the negative impact of the pandemic and provide a framework where much-needed leadership and responsibility can unfold (Filho, 2020).

The timeframe for SNDGs implementation entered the “Decade of Action” until 2030, but the SNDGs are far from being on track. In light of the pandemic, the “Decade of action” should be

re-launched as a 'Decade of Recovery and Action' using the SNDGs as a global framework. Due to the unexpected crisis, the shift of Member States' priorities, which are also the main entities responsible for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, is diminishing the efforts to reach the SNDGs (SDGCA, 2020). However, to avoid risking the progress achieved to date, the crisis can be used as an opportunity to strengthen commitment to the 2030 Agenda. By placing sustainable development at the core of recovery plans, a better response to future crises is enabled, implying stronger health systems, fewer people living in extreme poverty, less gender inequality, a healthier natural environment, and more resilient societies (Sachs, 2020). Balanced ecosystems are important for disease control, which highlights the significance of understanding the interdependencies between people and ecosystems.

The Role of Guidance and Counselling in enhancing Sustainable Development

Guidance and Counselling has an important role to play in raising the quality of work and quality of its students and graduates, increasing job satisfaction and motivating workers as well as enhancing productivity (Baba & Umar, 2014). In the new economic development therefore in this COVID 19, Guidance and Counselling is expected to produce an educated, skilled and motivated workforce for sustainable development and nation's growth. Guidance and Counselling Service is about the guidance of development of individuals and that of the economy in order to achieve Sustainable National Development Goals. In this regard, Guidance and Counselling is viewed as an indispensable instrument for economic development because through Vocational Guidance and Counselling, it will help to bring about empowerment improves a nation's economy, provides job opportunities, reduces crime rates and encourages creativity and competitiveness that enhances nation building as well as achieving SDNGs. Guidance and Counselling facilitates the adjustment of the skills and knowledge of man to the changing demands within society. Skill and knowledge as well as social values acquired through Guidance and Counselling allow an individual to manipulate the natural and physical environment, making life more useful and improving sustainable scientific, technological and economic development (Baba & Umar, 2014).

Through Vocational Guidance and Counselling Education provides goods and services are easily available thus, giving rise to high standard of living among the citizens of a nation. No doubt, Vocational Guidance and Counselling service is a veritable tool that cannot be ignored as it equips secondary school students with necessary skills for self-employment and ability to employ others for the development of a nation. It is in recognition of the changing role of Vocational Guidance and Counselling services in the world's economic order that different countries have come up with different frameworks towards repositioning their Guidance and Counselling and Vocational Education programmes. According to Alexandrou (2009), the French National Assembly enacted a law on social modernization which contains important measures concerning Vocational Guidance and Counselling services the right to employment and reported that the government of Denmark made efforts to increase the number of training places with emphasis on social and practical skills development. In Germany, use of the objectives of the country's education reform is to promote the vocational education of gifted young people and to raise the standard of Vocational Guidance and Counselling Educations.

The role of guidance and counselling to teacher trainees can be classified into two. In the first instance, the provision of a broad based and functional guidance and counselling will

assist the teacher-trainees to explore and understand themselves so that they can become self-directing and reliant individuals.

Secondly, it will afford their students the opportunity to learn vocational education from a teacher who properly understands himself and his environment. This self-understanding is essential and imperative because individuals who understand themselves and their world are usually more effective, more productive, happier and healthier human beings. This is because through guidance and counselling services individuals would achieve greater awareness of themselves. It could thus be said that provision of guidance and counselling services along with other pedagogical programmes in Vocational Education will help among others to:

- (1) Develop in teacher-trainees an awareness of opportunities in their personal, social, educational and vocational areas by providing them with appropriate useful and usable information to achieve sustainable development goals.
- (2) Help the under-achievers to use their potentials to the maximum in order to help in nation building.
- (3) Help teacher-trainees to acquire useful knowledge and skills necessary for survival in a situation as this COVID 19 pandemic.
- (4) Work with the parents/guardians with a view to assisting them to understand the needs and problems of their children/wards in acquiring Vocational Education so as to help accomplish the policies of National Development Goals among others.

Conclusion

Guidance and counselling services have emerged as the much required in the current COVID-19 pandemic. This is to enable secondary school students get established in order to achieve the national sustainable goals and also for helping students deal with the problems of education, employment, etc. during these trying times of COVID-19 pandemic. Vocational guidance and counselling services have been identified as indispensable tools of assisting secondary school students in adjusting for life actualization which can lead to sustainable development. Counselling services rendered in secondary school settings enhance students realization of potentialities for functional living. Vocational guidance and counselling services also help reduce un-employment in the labour market which is to say that when these secondary school students are properly guided, they will be able to choose a career that will not only benefit them but will go a long way in sustaining the economy of the nation.

Recommendations

To achieve sustainable development in Nigeria, through the implementation of Vocational Guidance and Counselling services in the secondary schools, the following recommendations are offered:

1. Government should diversify school curriculums and re-align them towards Education for Sustainable Development. This will in turn provide students with opportunities to choose options according to their interests. In the end Education for Sustainable Development would be attained even this period of post COVID-19.
2. Vocational Guidance and Counselling rehabilitation and recreational centres should be set up in various secondary schools and communities where counselling services should be obtained. Group counselling sessions/workshops/seminars should be held there for students, youths and other interested members of the public.

3. There is need for the Federal , State and Local governments to employ the services of guidance counsellors among the secondary schools who will help the student to have good vision concerning the world of work in order to achieve the sustainable development goals during this COVID-19 pandemic.

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