ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN SCHOOL COUNSELLING IN NIGERIA

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Abstract: The paper examines ethical considerations in school counselling in Nigeria. A review of core value of counselling, moral qualities of counsellor, code of conducts of ethical counselling and ethical practices of counselling were carried out. The paper concluded that ethical consideration is imperative in achieving desire results in the educational system in Nigeria.

Keywords: Ethical, School and Counselling

Introduction

Education is a medium for economic growth, cultural transformation, political emancipation, agricultural development and individual acceleration. The knowledge required for the survival and national development is generated through education in form of school. Ajibola and Ali (2014) define schools as an institution with specific purpose, to ensure the younger acquire knowledge in such a way that they will be useful to themselves and the society. However, most of the behaviours of both teachers and students in schools in Nigeria are not in line with goals and objectives of education in Nigeria. Mcmanu (1995) argued that there are several types of misbehavior which make the work of teachers and the learning process difficult. The author identified cases of learner’s misbehaviours as burning down of classroom. Learners attacking teachers, teachers extortion, teachers being absent from class during school hours and other misbehaviours that are not acceptable in the educational sectors. These misbehaviours and negative character exhibited by both teachers and students call for ethical considerations in school system in Nigeria.

People act within the school environment differently. Alutu and Aluede (2005) defines ethics as laid down guidelines, rules and regulations, code or conduct or principles of behavior based upon the ideals of morality to which a group or an organization agrees to regulate their behavior. In the context of this paper ethics implies rules and regulations documented to guide both students and teachers in various levels of education in Nigeria. The rules and regulation guide the conduct of an individual within the school system. According to Omotune (1992), every institutions of learning where there are both teachers and learners requires certain norms known as the code of conduct of behavior designed by authorities concerned with education to ensure absolute integrity of the school system and that of the individual. In Nigeria, the last two decades have witnessed an alarming rate of crisis of examination misconducts, students unrest, insissant strike action, secret cults related activities, corruption and misconduct especially in the secondary and tertiary institutions. The alarming rate of the increase misconduct in schools in Nigeria calls for novel counselling services to redress the situation. Misconduct among teachers and students has some social and psychological dimensions that the counsellor could intervene and address.

Counselling in schools in Nigeria is as old as the school in Nigeria. Ojagbawa (2014) defined counselling as exploratory trip between counsellor and client into the difficulties faced by the client including emotional, career, mental and related psychological issues. Egbo (2015) defined guidance and counselling as direction, steer lead, conduct and protectable of the individual to an acceptable standard. In the context of this paper guidance and counselling implies directing the individual learners and the teachers according to the laid down guidelines, rules and regulations of the school based upon the ideas of morality in order to achieve educational goals and objectives. Achieving educational goals and objectives calls for ethical considerations in school counselling. This paper will be discussed under the following:-

- Core values of counselling
- Moral qualities of counsellor
Core Values of Counselling

Evidence abounds of increasing incidents of misbehavior and misconduct by students and teachers at schools and colleges, which conflict with the core value of education. Alutu and Alude (2005) opined that education is meant for the training of the mind and character for the acquisition of practical and theoretical skills, knowledge and functional ideas for development and for creation of ideas. The character of the school counsellor in an institutions of learning in Nigeria can either stamp out or promote unethical issues. Such attitude by counsellor as harassment, receiving gratification of all kinds from students or parents can promote indiscipline. Kunu and Ursula (2012) argued that inadequate commitment to duty, incessant industrial actions as well as inadequate incentives and staff welfare policies are factors that promote unethical behavior in an institutions of learning.

The school counsellor is a teacher and a role model. The counselor is a man of respect and value. Henry (2014) defined value as the interpretation of response of an individual to a particular situation. In the school system value determine how the school counsellor goes about conducting the responsibility delegate to him or her. Value also determines the achievement on the work. Henry (2014) argued that value is the key assumption that underlie the question a counsellor ask the client, the answer the counsellor expects and what the defines the very assumptions upon which the communication is seated between the counselor and the client.

The belief of the school counsellor can informs the principles that underlie counselling services in schools. The school counsellor needs to appreciate the individual effort and culture within the school system. This could lead to principle of respect for human dignity and equality which is informed by the value system as it relate to human culture. British Association of Counselling Professionals (BACP, 2014) identified the following as ethical traits required by the school counsellor: sincerity, resilience, wisdom, humility, integrity, respect, competence, courage and fairness. Positive character exhibited by the school counsellor informs and shape behaviours of students and in turn student academic performances are improved.

Moral Quality of Counsellor

Issues surrounding moral life have continued to gain wide discussions in the past decade. Kanu and Ursula (2012) observed that a holistic review of ethical issues in educational system in Nigeria shows that the sector has received serious battering which has greatly dented it credibility, damaged its image, reduce its effectiveness and has not help to allow it make the expected impact that aught to make on character formation of the individual learners, positive lifestyles and the development of the entire country.

The National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004) highlighted promises for promoting moral quality in terms of integrity, self respect tolerance, dignity of labour and patriotism. The policy emphasis respect for the worth and dignity of an individual. Lakia (2013) observed that positive moral characters are deeply eroding from Nigeria education. The concept of morality of a counselor is part of positive attitude of the school system for effective counselling. Counsellor behavior builds on trust is essential ingredient of quality counselling. Various element of counselling depend on trust, communication, interpersonal relations, conflict resolution, problem solving and team work. This implies that the excellent education proposed by the National Policy on Education cannot be successfully implemented without sound moral quality ethical behavior of the school counsellor. Moral quality of the school counsellor is related with ethical behavior. Goetsch and David (2002) noted that in human communication, receiver do not accept message from sender they do not trust. In interpersonal relations, trust is most fundamental element. Counsellor and client that trust each other will be able to get along and work together.

On moral and quality of counsellor, Oghuvbut and Okpilike (2012) observed that counsellor (teacher) first moral obligation is to help provide excellent instruction. Counsellor with a high level of moral professionalism has a deep obligation to help students learn. Counsellor with moral quality demonstrate their moral professionalism by coming to work regularly and on time, being well informed about their student matter, observing school policies, cooperating with colleagues, criticizing unsatisfactory school policies and proposing constructive improvement for the school system.
Code of Conducts of Ethical Standard

The attitude of teachers and counsellors in institutions of learning can either stamp or promote examination malpractices, indiscipline, secret cult activities, indecent dressing and truancy among students. Many codes of ethics have been development by professional bodies, institutions and other bodies in Nigeria to guide the conduct of teachers, counsellors and other professional individuals in their chosen occupation. The Teacher Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN, 2004) provides a code of conduct for teachers, counsellors and students alike. According to Lekia (2013), the code emphasizes on honesty, integrity and dignity in study and good citizenship as values necessary for prevention of ethical behaviours among students, teachers and counsellors. Many professional association counselling association inclusive, have drawn a code of conduct and ethics to ensure that the behaviour and action of counsellors are guided by high ethical standards anchored on the core value of honesty, integrity, fairness, justice, impartiality, loyalty and faithfulness. In counseling profession the CACs code of ethics is based on Kitchener’s five moral principles of:-

- Autonomy
- Justice
- Beneficence
- Normalefience
- Fidelity

The most recent edition of the ACA code of ethics in counselling services was published in 2005.

According to ethics and legal (nd) the code addresses the responsibilities of professional counsellors toward their clients, colleagues, work place, and themselves by delineating the ideal standards for conducting one’s behaviour. The code has eight sections:-

- Counselling relationship
- Confidentiality, privileged communication, privacy
- Professional responsibility
- Relationship with other professionals
- Evaluation, assessment and interpretation
- Supervision, training and teaching
- Researching and publication
- Resolving ethical issues

The goals and objectives of National Policy on Education cannot be achieved unless there is a success of ethical and value orientation in institution of learning in Nigeria.

Ajagbawa (2014:12) observed that the code of ethics consist of the preamble, the principles and 9 sections standards in various areas of counselling. The principles are generic and are intended to be a reference point when counsellors are conflicted in making decisions on application of the codes of ethics. The principles have no enforceable legal basis but have the power of moral suasion and professionals are expected to accord it due importance in consultation work. Each of the 9 sections starts with an introduction which sets the tone and provides a serious point of reflection for counsellor in the interpretation and use of the particular code.

The purposes of the code of ethics are to a) clarify for its members the common code of ethics adopted and held by its members to guide their conduct, b) help to support the mission of the association which is to promote career development of all people over the life span, c) establish through the odes, the principles that help the counsellors define ethical behavior and conduct, d) provide ethical guidance to helping counsellors making professional decisions on ethical matters especially when conflicted and e) serve as a guide to both professional practitioners as well as the clients being served to understand their expectations and the limitations of the engagement.
Ethical Practice of Counselling in Schools

Issues surrounding professional practices have continued to gain wide debates in different areas in the past and the present. In the context of laying strong foundation for the overall development of education in Nigeria, ethical issues have remained relevance. Oraegbunam (2008) observed that school children are in their formative years that need developmental and preventive counselling rather than remedial, counselling school children early has lasting effect on adult personality hence the need for ethical practice in school counselling.

School counsellors action must represent ethical behavior. Wynne (1995) opinioned that counsellors and teachers with moral obligation is to provide excellent institution. Counsellor with high level of moral professionalism have a deep obligation to help students learn and behave in an acceptable manner. According to Wynne (1995) teachers and counsellors with sense of obligation demonstrate their moral professionalism, coming to work regularly and on time being well informed about their students matter.

- Planning and conducting counselling services with care
- Regularly reviewing and updating instructional practices.
- Cooperating with or confronting parent of underachieving students
- Cooperating with colleagues and observing school policies.
- Tactfully, but firmly criticizing unsatisfactory school policies and proposing constructive improvement.

Moral sensitivity and awareness how ones action affect other people is a fundamental issues in ethical practice of counselling. Benninga (2003) revealed that moral sensitivity involves a counsellor being aware of the different time of action and how each one of action affects both colleagues and students. Piaget (1965) and Kohlberg (1984) revealed that moral sensitivity involves knowing cause-consequent chain of events in the real school world and about what is fair and moral. It requires counsellors to make moral judgment about complex human activities.

Professional counselors have an enormous responsibility to uphold the public trust and must seek high levels of training, education and supervision in the ethical application of counselling practices, because school counsellors often behind closed doors with little oversight.

Ipaye (1993) Egbo (2009) in Egbo (2015; 249) writes that the good counsellor has the following responsibilities and functions on ethical practice counsellor:

- Rendering individual and group counselling as well as guidance services to all students;
- Providing consultative and coordinating services to students, parents, teachers and other community agencies that have one thing or another to do with the school.
- Facilitating smooth communication between the school on one hand and the home, the ministry, the teachers, commission/school board, and the large community on the other hand; relating information to all children when they need it, thus facilitating their decision making.
- Explaining appraisal information to students, their parents and teachers, and assisting them in making the best possible decision by and about the students.
- Helping with issues about movement from one class to another or transition from one level to another (and)
- Keeping the continuous assessment records of children.

If all of these roles are played by the counsellor, it is imperative that positive changes in behaviour, expected from the students will make excel in their academic assignments; think right about their vocational aspirations and desires, and act right in their personal and social dealings with others and in their respective environments and societies.

Conclusion

Considering the importance of ethics in counselling profession, ethical considerations in school counseling is imperative in achieving desire results in the educational system in Nigeria. Consideration of core values of counselling, moral qualities of counsellors and ethical standard in counselling profession in Nigeria is a means of
equipping the individual counsellors and works to affect others for maximum welfare of all and that of the society. Emphasis must therefore be placed on ethical considerations for quality development which will propel positive change in behavior.

References