



Counselling Services for Pre-Primary School Pupils ... (Yakubu & Muhammad, 2022)

Counselling Services for Pre-Primary School Pupils in Nigeria: Role of School Counsellors

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Abstract

Pre-primary education is an education given to children between the ages of 1-6 years in form of child-care service that parents enroll their children in before primary school education. According to Education Act and policy, as stated in the national policy on education, counselling services should be provided to learners at all level of education to enable effective school running towards realizing the stated educational goals. Counselling services in pre-primary education is very relevant in Nigeria and as such it was given emphasis as one of the programmes in Nigeria education system which is aimed at prepare the younger children to achieve smooth transition from home primary school. The role of pre-primary school guidance counsellor's may include collaborate, interact with school management and teachers and support the young learners by identifying their basic psychological and social needs and subsequently working towards helping them to satisfy such needs. School counsellors at pre-primary schools can also render counselling and consulting services targeted to help young learners to prevent risky behaviour and develop healthy personality. Challenges of pre-primary education counselling services include inadequate time, non-cooperative clients, lack of parental support, inadequate facilities, lack of funding, and shortage of qualified personnel, heavy workload and support from school administration.

Keywords: Running, Pre-primary Education, Role, and School Counsellors.

Introduction

Education at early years is significance to the formation and development of one's intelligence, growth, personality, social and character development, these years influence and determine child's future intellectually, socio-politically and economically. As such the importance of preprimary education cannot be overstressed. It is due to the value associated with preprimary education that modern societies give priority and invested total commitment to establishment and support to effective running of preprimary schools across the world. Ejieh (2006) in Tombowua (2013) opined similar to have stated that modern societies show serious concern for the education of their young ones by providing needed support to prepare them to succeed later in school.

Obidike (2012) observed that in most societies to make provision for early childhood education programmes of various kinds for children below six (6) years, which is the official school-going age mainly to prepare them for education in elementary schools. The Federal



Counselling Services for Pre-Primary School Pupils ... (Yakubu & Muhammad, 2022)

Government of Nigeria in the National Policy of Education (FRN, 2013) identifies the relevance of early childhood education in Nigeria and as such it was given priority as one of the programmes in the Nigerian educational system. There is no doubt, since there is no any form of education given that is waste, there is need for incorporation of counselling services in the running of preprimary education in Nigeria. Education for young children help them in thinking and reasoning as well as the way they perceive the educating young person is a critical concern of every human group that has to be organized and implemented on a sustainable basis. This is because each child is expected to acquire skills, knowledge, indeed culture from their older ones, and improve on them where the need arises in order to meet their needs and cope with other challenges.

Concept of Pre-primary Education

Pre-primary education refers to education offered to children between the ages of 0-6. It is a form of formal schooling for young children before attending basic education (primary education). According to Paul (2018), preprimary education is the last two years in early childhood development education that consist of pre-primary I and II where formal schooling takes place before learners join primary school. Preprimary education covers wide range of long-life learning that aims at harmonious development of child before they enter into primary education. Early child development ranges from formal pre- primary education integrated with national schools through kindergartens and pre- primary classes to the community based school's centers and that it is for children of 2-6 years (Sakuntala & Yagyanath, 2017).

It was also observed by Eckline (2017) that children are curious to learn everything that happens around them and this is natural and as such they should be provided with many activities accompanied with important adequate materials from the surrounding environment. Early childhood education and care according to Kamwitha, Ibrahim and Andrew (2020) is a programmatic service that broadly combines education and care in one seamless experience for young children. Pallvi (2016) states that in pre- primary, children's learning is centered on their parents and teachers for learning by doing and should consciously managed with adequate relevant instructional materials. According to Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013), the following are objectives of early childhood education:

1. Prepare the child for the primary level of education.
2. Effect a smooth transition from home to school
3. Provide adequate care and supervision for the children while their parents are at work (on the farm, in the market or offices).
4. Develop a sense of cooperation and team spirit.
5. Learn good habits, especially good health habits and.
6. Inculcate social norms.
7. Inculcate in the child the spirit of inquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature, the environment, art, music and playing with toys and so on.
8. Teach the rudiments of numbers, letters, colours, shapes, forms and so on through play.

According to Godwin and Fred (2016) the following are types of pre-school education:

1. Church Sponsored Centers:

Churches are prime centers for both early childhood, primary education and in recent times, for other levels of education programmes in Nigeria. Church leaders are motivated by a desire to provide a needed public service to make money to help pay for a church/school building, or as a way of attracting members to the faith. Some schools located in church



Counselling Services for Pre-Primary School Pupils ... (Yakubu & Muhammad, 2022)

premises are completely secular in nature, while others teach various aspects of the church's religion. Generally though, they must conform to state licensing standards when providing such early childhood education services.

2. Child Care Center:

These are center that provide supplemental care for children from infancy through kindergarten ages, during the typical working hours of parents. In some localities, they are open for operation between the hours of 7:00 am to 12:00 noon or beyond, depending on the needs of the parents and the school administration. Childcare centers are organized by profit and non-profit making groups. Most of them charge parents tuition fee, for sending their wards to the center, even if they have some form of subsidy from one governmental agency, church or the like. In Nigeria, most of these centers are profit making in nature. They are regulated by an agency of the government in most advanced countries, but here in Nigeria, the system is different as the regulation of such centers is not well organized and coordinated.

3. Family Day-Care Home:

This kind of service is mostly organized by mothers and family members who are professionals and graduates, but wish to apply their professional skills, while staying with the children at home. Sometimes also, spinsters may engage in the running of such family day care institutions. Such homes are regulated by the local or state agency.

4. Drop-in-Child-Care Centers:

These centers cater for young children on an hourly basis, usually for an hourly fee; according to the number they are allowed to accept. Drop-in centers are also located in places such as shopping centers or amusement parks. Some drop-in centers are organized around a child abuse therapy group to serve parents who may be inclined to abusing their children. In some parts of the world, particularly in industrialized societies, parents drop off their children at such centers, whenever they feel the stress and strain of child care. Teachers at such centers, play very important role, as part of the support team of the Mental Health Agency, helping to rehabilitate the abusive parents. As a result, such teachers require specialized training, which must include experience and ability to make children feel secure, comfortable and happy because children act like typical strangers with here-and-now needs.

5. Employer Sponsored Child Care Centers:

This form of childcare institution was pioneered in the United States of America during the World War II, in which mothers were needed to work in Defense Plants. The system as of today is currently undergoing a reform; child care is now being provided on worksite for employees' children or an allowance may be provided them as part of the employees' benefit package for purposes of selecting their choice child care institution. Employer-sponsored child care centers now abound in major cities and towns in Nigeria and they provide such services both during work and recreational hours.

6. Parent-Cooperative Schools:

This type of pre-primary educational service is typically organized by groups of middle-class families in order to provide high-quality early childhood educational experience for their children at an affordable rate. Parents in a cooperative, contribute to keep up their facilities and to continue operating the school programme. One highly valued component of the parent-cooperative school is the close link parents feel about their children's education and their teachers too. Parents learn a great deal about children by helping in their children's group. Parent-Cooperative groups are popular today in America among families where their mothers do not hold full-time job.



Counselling Services for Pre-Primary School Pupils ... (Yakubu & Muhammad, 2022)

7. Nursery Schools:

The Nursery School is also called the Pre-kindergarten school center or the Child Development Centre. Nursery Schools are generally adjudged more educational than Childcare Centers, in times past. But recent developments in the educational sector, especially at the pre-primary aspect, is gradually being eliminated as increased attention is now also being given to Child care Centers.

The Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013) list out some approaches the government designed to realize the objectives of preprimary education in Nigeria, which are as follows:

- i. Making provision in Teacher Training Institution for production of specialist teachers in pre-primary education.
- ii. Encourage private efforts in the provision of pre-primary education.
- iii. Ensure that the main method of teaching in the pre-primary institutions will be through play and that the curriculum of teacher training college is appropriately oriented to achieve this.
- iv. Ensuring that the medium of instruction will be principally the mother-tongue or the language of the local community.
- v. Develop the orthography for many more Nigerian languages, and.
- vi. Produce textbooks in Nigerian languages, FRN reported that some of these developments are already being pursued in the University Departments of linguistics under the auspices of some state ministries of Education. This Language centre will be expanded so as to have wide scope;

Role of Guidance Counsellors in Pre-Primary Education

The relevance of counsellors in the smooth running of early childhood education cannot be overstressed. Therefore, the counsellors' interventions contribute to the successful education of young children (Agatha, 2017). According to Agatha (2017), the counsellor is expected to play the following roles in the preprimary centers:

1. School counsellor's collaboration with school management.
2. School counsellor's partnership with preschool teachers.
3. School counsellor's interact and cooperate with parents.
4. Counsellor's interact and guide the young learners.
5. Counselling Association of Nigeria (CASSON) consultation with Government for early childhood education (Agatha, 2017).

Agatha (2017) also identifies the following ways in which the school counsellor could collaborate with school proprietor or manager to promote effective learning of young children:

1. Persuading school proprietors and government, to provide a safe and orderly learning environment for the young children and work tools for teachers and the counsellor, to effectively discharge their legitimate duties.
2. To inject more fund into the preschools in order to promote learning activities.
3. To ensure that qualified teachers are recruited and
4. To ensure that teachers are in their classes and using the appropriate methods of teaching young children.

Agatha (2017) equally points out the following benefits of a preschool counsellor to preschool teachers:



Counselling Services for Pre-Primary School Pupils ... (Yakubu & Muhammad, 2022)

1. Promote positive teacher-children relationship. This is also the view of Thompson (1998) in Agatha (2017) who stated that the most powerful weapon available to preschool teachers, who want to foster favourable learning climate is a positive relationship with their learners.
2. Persuade teachers to apply appropriate motivational tools that would promote effective learning. And to play the role of mother and father or a friend to the young learners. This will create a warm and friendly atmosphere which could enhance effective learning in the preschools.
3. Assist children with special needs for necessary interventions. Early recognition and response to these deficiencies could have a major impact on the child's success in school.
4. Ensure teachers work out strategies for promoting effective learning such as communicating positive expectations, correcting children in a constructive way, developing positive classroom pride, be more caring and to treat all children equitably.
5. Encourage teachers to refer young learners with learning difficulties to visit the counsellor for possible intervention and assistance.

School counsellors could go the extra mile of consultation with young learners' parents either by going to their homes or inviting their parents to a meeting. The following could be the benefits:

1. Encourage parents to give maximum financial support to their children by paying school fees on time, meeting the basic needs such as elementary books, playing toys, uniforms etc.
2. Persuade parents to ensure that the children are regular and punctual at school.
3. To give parents an update of their children's progress in school.
4. Encourage parents to feed their children with balanced diets, so as to enhance mental development and stability.
5. Make parents to see the need to map out time on a routine basis for their children's private study and to do all assignments given to them (Agatha, 2017).

The following could be the duties of a counsellor according to Ojeme (2012) which would help to facilitate learning of preschool children:

1. The counsellor should assist the young learners with counselling needs to proffer possible solutions to their problems by eliciting the client's personal-social information, which would serve as a useful data for counselling.
2. The school counsellor should regularly set aside quality time for monitoring of young children, in order to identify any child that is behaving abnormally for prompt intervention.
3. Counsellors should organize excursion for children to visit places of interest that will develop their cognitive, social and psychological domains.
4. The counsellor should have interpersonal interactions with learners. It is well known that establishing personal contact or rapport with the children, will allow for ventilation.
5. Counsellors should organize debates drama, play, art and music competitions for the young learners.

According to Okobiah (1997) as cited in Eboh (2019) the following could be used as the counselling techniques to help the child achieve the set goal of developmental guidance:

1. Excursions.
2. Film shows.
3. Providing avenues for modeling.
4. Individual and group counselling.
5. Inculcating good interpersonal relationships.
6. Psychological test materials including test and non-test instruments.



Counselling Services for Pre-Primary School Pupils ... (Yakubu & Muhammad, 2022)

7. Consulting with parents, teachers and significant others.
8. Autobiography.

Challenges of Pre-primary Education in Nigeria

According to Agatha (2017), certain factors has been identified as challenges of preprimary education in Nigeria. These factors include:

1. Inadequate Professionally Trained Teachers:

Early childhood education is unique in its requirement of trained teachers. Apart from the chronic apathy of prospective teachers in opting for training for this level of education, there is also the limited availability of training institutions. It's arguable that most of the private nursery school proprietors operate the schools as business center with the aim of maximizing profits, and many of these schools employ Nigeria certificate in Education (NCE) holders, secondary school dropout and learners who have no knowledge of child psychology to teach (Wordu et.al. 2015). This is contrary to the Policy of the Federal Government NPE (1981) and the subsequent editions of 1998, 2004 and 2013, which emphasized the training of teachers, including the pre-primary school teachers, to ensure quality education at all levels. Obiweluzor and Owie (2016) argued that there is a wide gap between the quality of teachers and the practice of early childhood education. The consequence is that early childhood schools suffer inadequate of professionally qualified teachers.

2. Human and material Resources:

Education authorities in Nigeria are given more priority to the wellbeing of primary or secondary schools. Consequently investment in early childhood education is neglected. Thomas (2016), stated that lack of resources arise from poor funding at the most fundamental level. The resultant effect is that this level education fundamentally does not poses what it needs in human and material resources evidently manifested in terms of unprofessional teachers and poor learning environment.

3. Lack of Early Childhood Counselling Services:

It is easily observed that the services of guidance Counsellors are not engaged in pre-nursery and nursery schools in many Nigerian schools. Counsellors are usual trained for higher level of education and perhaps ill-prepared for the basic skills required for effective early childhood education counselling services. Also, guidance and counselling services would have been useful also to the care-givers and parents of children with disabilities.

4. Unhealthy Locations of School:

Another challenge of early childhood education is the location of schools. Educational learning environment should be located in places that are conducive for effective teaching and learning. Hogu (1992) as cited by Agatha (2017) observed that schools are located in noisy areas, close to the markets, industries, roads, residential-quarters and church premises and so on. All these are potential hindrances to the achievement of education goals.

5. Early Childhood Education Curriculum:

As with the teachers, so is the thin availability of experts in designing the curriculum for early childhood education. Denga (1993) emphasized that there should be articulated curriculum for Early Childhood Education, parents and caregivers. He observed that pre-primary schools, currently do not operate uniform curriculum but rather curriculum are developed by proprietors, borrowing ideas from one another. This challenge needs to be quickly addressed.



Counselling Services for Pre-Primary School Pupils ... (Yakubu & Muhammad, 2022)

On the other hand, Boitt (2016) discussed the following challenges of counselling services in schools at all levels:

1. Inadequate Time:

Inadequate time is the greatest challenge to the implementation of guidance and counselling in schools. Most schools have no regard for guidance and counselling activities. School time-table does not make provisions for guidance and counselling activities. It is designed without giving specific period of time for students to have any form of formal guidance and counselling encounters with professional counsellor's or selected teachers (Haruna, 2015).

2. Inadequate Facilities:

The quality guidance and counselling services required adequate and effective facilities such as office space, bookshelves, drawers, files, finance, time, reference books, guidance and counseling manuals and psychological test materials. Several studies have identified inadequate facilities as a challenge to implementation of guidance and counseling programme in schools at all levels. Facilities such as computers, training the counsellors in ICT, counselling clinics, radios, televisions, one-way mirrors, generators and furniture are lacking in many schools in Nigeria.

3. Lack of Parental Support:

Counsellors need to be supported in carrying out innovative activities towards provision of those services. Lack of parental support is a major challenge to implementation of guidance and counseling programme in preprimary schools. Parents tend to avoid forums where their children private and domestic issues are discussed with outsiders (teacher counselors included) due to cultural reasons. Sometimes, organizations that provide such forums like the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) are none existent in some schools and in places where the associations are established, parents avoid such meetings whenever they are invited (Haruna, 2015).

4. Lack of Funding:

Scholars and educators have underscored the importance of adequate funding for guidance and counselling programmes (Songok et.al. 2013). The programmes needs adequate funding as this enables them to put up infrastructure and purchase the required facilities. A counsellor who has adequate and relevant materials and facilities tend to be more confident, effective and productive. Lack of finance is one of the challenges faced by schools when implementing guidance and counselling programmes in school. Various scholars have highlighted inadequacy of funds as a challenge faced by guidance and counselling programmes in developing countries (Haruna, 2015).

6. Non-Cooperative Clients:

This is another challenge that militates against the implementing guidance and counselling programmes. It is not possible to provide clients with quality services without their cooperation. Clients are not willing to disclose their problems and be counseled by the teacher counselors as they did not trust the services providers. The non-cooperation of clients may perhaps be due to negative attitudes towards guidance and counseling.

7. Support from School Administration:

Inadequate support from school administration was the last item that the counsellors' checked in the list of challenges of implementing guidance and counselling in schools. School counselors are not given adequate support by the school administrators and teachers. This could be in the area insufficient information on counselling on the part of the teachers and school



Counselling Services for Pre-Primary School Pupils ... (Yakubu & Muhammad, 2022)

administrators. It is difficult for counsellors to render services effectively without support of the school administration. Guidance and counseling services are offered in schools because counsellors attend to learners' educational, vocational, emotional, social and personal development.

8. Shortage of Qualified Personnel:

The success of a guidance and counseling programme depends on the knowledge and attitudes of the service providers. Training is therefore central for the success of counselling services as knowledge and positive attitudes are acquired through it. However, there is an acute shortage of trained teacher/counselors in many countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

9. Heavy Workload:

The counsellors' heavy workload is an impediment to effective implementation of guidance and counselling programmes in schools. This is situation where a counsellor handles the normal workload (more than 18 lessons) per week in addition to their counseling duties and any other responsibilities assigned by the school administration. This means that teacher counsellors have little time to dedicate to provision of guidance and counselling services and this compromises the quality of the counselling services. In the light of this challenge, there is need for schools to appoint fulltime teacher counselors or reduce the workload of the teacher counselors to enable them focus on the duties or services (Haruna, 2015).

Conclusion

It could be concluded that the role of guidance counsellor in pre-primary education cannot be ignored if realization of our educational objectives remain our topmost priority. Therefore, government, proprietors/proprietress should provide adequate counselling facilities in our pre-primary education centers so that guidance counsellors in pre-primary education center scan be motivated to render effective guidance and counselling services to our younger children so that they will have a smooth transition from home to primary school.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are suggested to enhance counselling services in the running of pre-primary education:

1. Effective Guidance and counselling services depends on the knowledge and attitudes of the guidance counsellors' service providers. Therefore, government via our high institutions should train more professional guidance counsellors, employed and post them to various pre-primary education centers to assist our younger children.
2. School heads should provide relevant counselling facilities and furniture needed to enhance counselling services in the running of early childhood care education.
3. Government should organize workshops and seminars for school heads, teachers and parents on the value and relevance of counsellors in early childhood education.
4. Workshops and seminars should be organized for counsellors on-line counselling through training in information technology (IT) so as to connect them with global issues.

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Counselling Services for Pre-Primary School Pupils ... (Yakubu & Muhammad, 2022)

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