

## **The Role of Para-Counselling in the Implementation of Universal Basic Education System of Nigerian Education**

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### **Abstract**

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This paper discusses the role of Para-counselling in the implementation of the basic Education system in Nigerian education. The National Policy on education recognises the role of counselling in secondary schools. Counsellors are therefore posted to work in secondary and tertiary institutions. Elementary schools are neglected even though most of the problems in secondary and tertiary institutions may have their roots in primary schools. Therefore if problems at primary education are not attacked early enough, they could spill over in to secondary schools. A dearth of professionally trained counsellors would necessitate the selection of Para-counsellors from among the teaching staff. These need to be equipped with basic Para-counselling knowledge and skills ahead of efforts to acquire professional counsellors in the system. The paper concludes with a suggestion giving due recognition to Para-counselling services in schools. Moreover, Para-counselling services should be extended to non-school settings in order to arrest some of the problems rooted in family and community environment that may give rise to an acute need for counselling services among school children.

**Key words:** Para-counselling, Universal Basic Education Centres, Elementary schools, Para-counsellors

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### **Introduction**

This paper examines the critical role of Para-counselling in the implementation of the cardinal goals of the UBE Programme of the Federal Government. We are always told that any time we are sick, we should not delay in seeing the physician. If we delay, our sickness will either get worse or it will take a longer time to heal. The primary health care Department warns parents through jingles and other electronic and print media to guard against the killer diseases that attack children under age. Those who do not listen to the warning

end up settling heavy medical bills for the adult members of the family. In the same vein, nursery and primary school education under the current Universal Basic Education (UBE) Programme is the bedrock upon which all other levels of our education system is built and without which educational structures erected will not have chances of success (Fajonyomi, 2006; Umar, 2006).

One of the objectives of the UBE is to reduce the incidence of drop-outs in our schools and to ensure smooth transition from primary to senior secondary schools. These laudable objectives cannot be

realized without the contributions of counselling and human development service. Human development counsellors are trained in the art of assisting children to transit from primary to junior and senior secondary school levels.

The dearth of professional counsellors according to Okoronka (2006), in our schools, has remained a serious threat to the overall success of our educational programme. The strategy of utilizing Para-counsellors as a stop gap has become inevitable. This therefore calls for the need for this professional body to provide basic knowledge and skills for Para-counsellors through a formalized training programme to handle the problems of the Nigerian child while efforts are being made to train professional counsellors. This paper therefore discusses the role of Para-counselling under the following sub-sections:

- The concept of Para-counselling
- The relevance of Para-counselling in UBE schools.
- Basic knowledge and skills for Para-counsellors.
- Para-counselling services

### **The Nature of Para-counselling**

One of the major roles of counselling is to provide valid and unstable information to clients in order to make informed decisions about their lives. The limited number of available counsellors in schools particularly in UBE schools places a greater burden on classroom teachers to assume this role in a more systematic manner; hence the introduction of Para-counselling. The activities and responsibilities of Para-counsellors are similar to that of counsellors except that the former are limited in professional training. Para-counsellors provide complementary roles to professional counsellors in the provision of guidance services to students. At the Universal Basic Education and Junour secondary School levels in particular, the

strategy of utilizing Para-counsellors as a stop gap has become inevitable owing to the dearth of professional counsellors in the system.

### **The relevance of Para-counselling in UBE schools**

The cardinal objectives of the Universal Basic Education may suffer draw backs if due recognition is not given to counselling. This is because most of the problems encountered by secondary school students have their roots at the basic education level. This position is in line with the view of Durojaiye (1976) which reported that a child's growth is a continuous process which goes on from one stage of development to the next stage. The UBE Programme seems to have played down the importance of counselling in children's transition in the Nigerian Education System. This is because the National Policy on Education (2004) has not given due recognition to the role of human development counselling at the elementary schools (Fajonyomi, 2006). The primary school is neglected. Fajonyomi (2006) further reported performance of these counsellors in secondary schools has been very frustrating. According to her, it is not because they are not competent but because they are always busy fighting symptoms of behaviour and academic maladjustment whose origin is routed in the family and primary school environment. It is therefore obvious that anybody that specializes in attacking symptoms will only end-up pruning the problems and will never overcome the problems unless he removes the roots. Our primary schools have no counsellors. The primary school teachers who are employed to handle these pupils are not experts in behaviour engineering. They are only there to dish our knowledge and not to counsel because they do not possess the relevant therapies.

The universal Basic Education system of education merges the nursery and primary school level with junior secondary level. This means that children and adolescents would spend the critical part of their lives in the first tier of our education system. The dearth of professional counsellors in Nigeria and the need to equip Para-counsellors with necessary basic knowledge and counselling skills to assist students to resolve the major problem areas before they transmit to senior secondary level should be the concern of the Nigerian Counselling Association

### **Basic knowledge and skills for Para-counsellors**

The implication of the basic education system is that Nigerian children will have to remain in school for primary and junior secondary education which spans nine years. This engagement makes the child spend a critical period of their adolescent life in school. In recognition of the massive population of the children involved at this stage, Universal basic education programme at both federal and state levels has introduced a need to identify academic staff with desirable human qualities to serve as Para-counsellors while making efforts to acquire professional counsellors. These Para-counsellors are expected to acquire basic knowledge and skills in order to successfully deliver the services. One of the required basic knowledge required from all Para-counsellors is understanding the behaviour of the adolescent. According to Sababa (2010), Para-counsellors must know the students they are dealing with. This is essential for being in position to know how adolescents behave and how they can manipulate the environment to produce good conduct. For instance, Roadside Mechanics who specializes in the repairs of Toyota vehicles will fail in their career if they are given Lorries or petrol tankers to repair. This is because

Toyota cars and Lorries or long vehicles do not have the same system though they belong to the family of automobile.

Para-counsellors must therefore understand the adolescent because they live in a world different from ours as adults. Most adolescents in the Nigerian setting hardly interact with the adult members of the community unless on matters dealing with food, clothing, upkeep responsibilities or choice of school problems. Adolescents' daily lives are more often shared with their peers than with adult members of the communities. This is especially the case for matters of personal, social, academic and sexual problems. Why do these children prefer to consult or contact their friends instead of their parents and teachers? The following are some of their reasons given in a group counselling session organised by the writer: "My teachers?" Hmm, Hmm, I don't dare to ask them what it is like to fall in love. They will question me instead of telling me the facts. They may jump into conclusions that am in love" my parents? They do not seem comfortable. Neither do i should we talk about body changes such as wet bodies and about friends. They don't seem to understand us. There are so many curfews. We can't do this and can't do that. It is so very easy to talk to friends. They are Cool. They know what we are going through. They are also experiencing this growing up stuff. They do not condemn us. At least they listen to us even if they are not able to help us. They are there even in difficult times (Sababa, 2010 p.3).

These voices of our children and adolescents sound very familiar to us as practicing counsellors. It is true that most of them regard us adults as old school and prefer to relate with their peers than adults. The failure of the adolescent to share his/her problems with the adults such as parents, teachers or counsellors may not be unconnected with their lack of confidence in these adults. There is greater tendency

to count on their peers as confidants. However, the fact that the peers are not professional counsellors or people with the right solution to their problems may often lead to bad results. It is therefore necessary for the adult members to be approachable and sensitive to the adolescents' needs rather than be judgemental about them. The para-counsellor in particular has to be conscious of these needs and maintain a sensitive and approachable disposition to the adolescent school child. The responsibility to the learner is to assist them experience smooth transition from junior to senior secondary life.

### **Basic skills**

Having acquired rudimentary knowledge of the behaviour of the Nigerian child and adolescent, encompassing the physical development stages and the problems that accompany each stage, some basic skills are important for a Para-counsellor to acquire in order to succeed in the tasks of counselling. These skills included the administration and interpretation of tests to ascertain students' performances in a number of respects: achievement, attitude, aptitude, personal problems as well as vocational interests. However, the right type of test should be used in order to ascertain the appropriate need of the students. The following discourse would be instructive in this respect.

**(i) Attitude tests:** Para-counsellors should also acquire rudimentary knowledge on attitude tests. Attitude tests try to find out students' attitude towards school and certain subjects such as English, Mathematics and Integrated science.

**(ii) Student problem inventory:** The test helps counsellors to identify students who are

facing spiritual, academic, social and sexual problems.

**(iii) Aptitude tests:** Para-counsellors need to know those who are good in science, arts, commercial and technical subjects. They need to have basic knowledge of scoring and interpretation of aptitude tests such as mechanical comprehension tests, paper form board, verbal and quantitative aptitude etc.

**(iv) Vocational interest inventory:** Solberg (2010) advocated for career awareness counselling right from the elementary level in order to prepare our children for a productive future. Vocational interest tests help counsellors to know the level of interest a child has for a particular occupation. functional skills in the administration, scoring and interpretation of these tests will be essentials for Para-counsellors if they are to be effective in taking vital decisions particularly in the placement of students for career direction

**(v) Achievement tests.** Achievement tests help counsellors to know whether a child is doing well or not. Continuous assessment scores and end of term examination results are the tools for making decisions on each student.

Katijah (2010) suggests that Para-counsellors should acquire knowledge and counselling skills in the areas of understanding counselling and its ethics, self-awareness as counsellors, knowledge of skills to inspire in clients, listening and interviewing modalities as well as the

treatment of children with mental disorders or addictions.

### **Para-counselling services**

Para-counselling is usually tilted towards improvement in the quality of life of the people. In the developed country, Para-counselling has been well established in most institutions such as military, religious, social and health. According to Wan (2010) Para-counsellors are employed in the Singaporean Armed Forces in order to handle recruitment in to National service and rehabilitation of soldiers and fellow service men. In the Police force, they rehabilitate the families of dead officers during their difficult moments. Para-counselling services are offered in several other countries in various aspects of social needs.

### **Counselling and family service centre:**

Para-counsellors provide family education programme to parishioners such as marriage preparation and parenting. According to Choi, Tan and chen (2010) many parents and children who are separating or divorcing in different circumstances need help from neutral third party, the Para-counsellors. Family education programme provides knowledge and skills that are vital to the healthy functioning of the family at various points in the life cycle. Talks are organised with the aim of promoting healthy family life and enhancing inter-generation family bonding ( Choi, 2010).

### **Conclusion**

This paper examined the critical role of Para- counsellors in the implementation of Universal Basic Education System of Nigerian Education. The counselling Association of Nigeria and the Universal Basic Education Board should therefore give official backing to Para-counselling and its role in the provision of Para-counselling services in

schools. Para-counsellors should be massively trained or certificate and Diploma levels in order to take care of our children and adolescents in the 9 year basic education level whole policies are formulated on massive production of counsellors at the bachelor and masters degree levels. Para-counselling services should also be extended to non-school settings in order to raise the quality of life of the people and to reduce some of the problems in the community that may affect students' behaviour and academic performance in the school.

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