

COUNSELING AND PROFESSIONALISM IN NIGERIA: AN INSIGHT

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ABSTRACT

This paper examined the fate of contemporary graduate counsellors in the Nigerian society. Professionalism enhances the status and legal dominion of an occupation by its members and those in the practice, to have control over the members and bringing about an enhancement of their status in that society. This paper x-trace the historical antecedents of counselling in the traditional African society and summarized the features of her healing process. It lists the characteristics of a profession and the extent to which counselling in Nigeria meet these features where it concluded that, counselling is not yet fully professional. This paper, however, recommended the review of the counselling syllabus. It should be made to reflect all the counselling needs of other professions and the sensitization of the program, through the social media.

KEYWORDS: Characteristics of a Profession, counselling in Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Connoisseurs' with legitimate professional appellations are supposed to acquire knowledge, skills and competencies that are related to making personal, educational and career decisions, but what is their fate in Nigeria, today often times, one sees with great are signposts of legal firms, accounting firms, medical firms, surveying firms, just to mention but a few. These are professional bodies that are taking their living in these occupations.

Professionalism connotes an enhancement of the status and legal dominion of an occupation, it members and these in the practice to have control over the members bringing about the enhancement of their status in the society (Eg: bochukwu and Aihie, 2011).

In the Nigerian society, a lot of universities offer courses in educational guidance and counselling who, according to Cutler and Sheppard (2012) are perceived as power brokers, oracles, witch doctors, the gurus and mentors – these trained professionals promote healing by harnessing the forces of the natural, spiritual, physical and psychological domains where they translate classroom experience to performance and task. In spite of the numerous counsellors churned out from Nigeria universities on a yearly basis.

No record of any of them operating as professionals like these in medicine, law, accounting, surveying, etc. Just to mention but a few. How professional then are they? This will be unveiled as this write-up unfolds.

What are the Characteristics of a Profession? A Summary of them from Various Sources are Given Below

- In depth training of an intellectual posture
- Its services are important to the society.

- Professionals have independence on how to perform their jobs
- Those in the practice must be certificated to practice.
- They usually have an umbrella body.
- There is a self regulation that protects practitioners which supports the disciplinary criteria and steps that are capable of censuring, suspending or even removing those who contradict the code.
- There must be an ethical code that regulates its relationship with the public, clients and colleagues.

([Http//ranger. Utd edu/Carrol/Cs, 4317 professions/ts/doo5. Htm](http://ranger.Utd.edu/Carrol/Cs,4317professions/ts/doo5.Htm); Harrison, 1978).

An Appraisal of these Characteristics in Relation to Counselling as it is Today

To what extent are these characteristics applied to Nigerian trained counsellors Counsellor in Nigeria is well trained. They obtained first degrees and higher degrees in educational guidance and counselling in reputable universities in Nigeria. They have a very robust syllabus content that can compete favourably with international standards. Although most of the trained counsellors are only found in the academic environment and others in administrative, paramilitary and banking sectors.

There is no doubt that counselling is very important to the society. One of the factors for success in life is taking right decision, it counselling is a psychological tranquilizer, a palliative, through counselling, people are saved, people are helped by helping others. Intensive training in observing non-verbal behaviour analysing motives, handling confrontation and through reflective feelings, differences are made in people's lives. The counsellor assists people out of their problems through his/her professional know-how thereby assisting them to change voluntarily (Jeffrey and Sheppard, 2011). Egbochukwu (2008) averred that counsellors assist people to clarify their ideas, goals and attitudes towards actualisation. The counsellor plays a preventive, rehabilitative and developmental role in the life of an individual. The counsellor plans obtain and derive maximum benefit from educational, vocational and other kinds of experience which will enable these individuals to discover and develop their potentials.

As at today, this writer is not aware of any certified and licensed counsellor in Nigeria. This is an integral part of professional ethics. It provides guides and standards for the activities of a profession. It spelt out professional practice codes and etiquette for professional counsellors in Nigerians minimum institutional and international standards (Egbochukwu and Aihie, 2011). Part of the conditions for certification as provided by the chairman of the committee on certification and licenses policy- professor A.A Adegoke during the Enugu 2017 CASSON conference, which is still a paper-tiger. They are as follows;

Purpose of Certification

- Promoting quality assurance for the profession in Nigeria
- Identity to the Nigerian public certified counsellors in Nigeria
- Set standard of professional training and profession of counselling in Nigeria
- Monitor counsellor education in Nigeria

- Maintenance of certified counsellors in Nigeria
- Partner with accredited counsellor education departments in institutions on standards.

According to the Same Document, the Following Serves the Purpose of Licenses

- Regulate and control standards and qualify in professional counselling practice
- Ensure adherence to standard codes and etiquette in professional practice for certified and licensed counsellors
- Provide security and protection for professional counsellors
- Ensure adherence to oath of induction to professional counselling.

These ideas are really lofty and will serve to protect the sanctity of the supposed counselling profession but it is still a mere paper work.

Historical Antecedents of Counselling in the Traditional African Society

People had always played the role of a counsellor right from cradle. In Africa especially in Nigeria, in particular, in all the communities, the elders were seen as authority figures due to their assumed wisdom occasioned by their age which to them is synonymous with wisdom in these societies, there exist up-till now spiritualists known as herbalists who confer with oracles before decisions are made for the clients. This involves spiritual divination through consultation with certain gods. Appropriate rites are made that many involve serves of sacrifices that act as a precursor to the flow of information between the diviner and the gods which serve as the solution sought for an issue (Nwaorgu, 2002).

Often, information/instruction from the herbalist is accepted dogmatically that is, the step by step approach to the solving of problems or tanning decision is other dictated and cannot be subject to questioning. This healing process, according to Nwaogu (2012) is characterised by the following characteristics:-

- A belief in a supernatural force
- Such forces are deposited in the healer
- There is a nexus between the healer and the force through involution of spirits
- The healing sought determines the type of sacrifices offered
- The power possessed is inherited and can be passed from generation to generation.

The story today is different; counsellors are formally and educationally trained with intimidating academic qualifications.

How Professional is counselling Today

The emergency of counselling as a professional and indispensable educational service was facilitated by the federal government of Nigeria in her policy on education (FUN, 1977, revised edition, 2014). The policy states:-In view of the apparent ignorance of many young people about cancer prospects and in view personality maladjustment among school children, law officers and counsellors should be appointed in post-primary institutions since qualified personnel in this category are scarce, government should continue to make provisions for the training of

interested teachers in guidance and counselling. Guidance and counselling shall also feature in teacher education programmes proprietors of schools shall provide guidance counsellors in adequate number in each, primary and secondary schools (pg 40).

From the above policy statement, a limitation was placed on the functions and rules of guidance services – for the maladjusted personalities and making appropriate career choice all within the educational system. From conception, therefore, its focus had been on giving succour to products of secondary school in the area of making appropriate career choice and bringing about attitudinal and personality change. Why limiting it to the school system? Philosophically speaking, counselling is for all people and by implication it is needed in all professional setting. It is needed for instance, in the industries to boost the morale and output of workers, reducing conflicts in work places, etc. For now, guidance and counselling is only pronounced in the educational sector. Therefore, how can it be truly professional when its present status negates its principle of universality – for all people?

A list of some courses that are needed to be passed as minimum academic standard for certification of counsellors and licensure as given by Adegoke (2010) include human growth and development; child development, adolescent psychology, human learning, psychological testing, group dynamics, procedure, cancer and vocational development, counselling theories and personality development, research methods, etc lay more emphasis on courses needed in the classroom setting. How would these courses fit into the police, army, air force, the banking sector, land industries, etc? There is no compartmentalisation in the counselling programme today in Nigeria for it to fit in to other professional bodies so that it could be beneficial to them.

How many Nigerians know of counselling and its existence as a profession? An average Nigerian is very secretive. How can they be convinced that, there are specialised and trained individuals who give interventions to individuals experiencing problems of adjustment, issues that are developmental in nature, and problems of daily living including career, education, family, personal and esteem - related issues? The communal life pattern of an average Nigerian does not encourage them from going out to share their secrets with somebody called a “counsellor” who may not be their kinsmen. Information is a key factor for effective counselling. When information are hoarded, how can there be solutions to problems where appropriate interventions can be sought?

Education is both an end and an end itself. To be self reliant and economically independent, to live a fulfilled life through a productive work life. Can counselling as a profession today give an appreciable means of livelihood. If it is truly professional. How marketable will it be outside the classroom situation given the present ignorance of the existence of the service? Will there be patronage? For now, it has no clearly defined status in the Nigerian society for all those who in that profession. Today, it has a low level of respect.

Professions like law, medicine, etc spend appreciable time to learn the practical aspects of their chosen field. Lawyers for instance spend extra one year for a professional qualification in a law school, those in medicine spend enough time to acquire practical experience. What about counselling? Ability to put into use the theoretical knowledge is what matters in a professional programme which requires extra time, commitment and dedication.

The practical experience in counselling programmes in Nigeria today is not enough to qualify a graduate to become a formidable and full time professional that can stand the test of tannin.

Counselling is about touching lives in such a way that the result of the impact is seen while you are alive and after departure from this world. There could be behavioural, attitudinal and developmental changes that could bring a transmutation of an individual. A pastor/imam/traditional healer equally does this despite the fact they have no professional training in counselling since counselling is seen ignorantly as mere advice giving. Therefore, there could be role conflict between a professional counsellor and a religion leader giving spiritual counselling. This could equally affect the professional status of counselling. Again, no programme for paraprofessional counselling programmes are known in the profession as it is today. This would have taken care of associate counsellors or paraprofessionals. (Jeffrey & Sheppard, 2011).

Finland (2017), averred that the birth of a profession is connected with the evolution of division of labour and also with the battle for point. This is because according to Lindquist (1995) a profession signifies a distinctly profiled and independent profession. There exists a common professional socialisation, identify and a clearly defined status in society for all those who work in that profession. What is the status of counsellors in Nigeria society today?

He observed that the level of respect held by the society for the social field is not very high.

Professionalism adds colour, protects, dignifies, legitimise the operational jurisdiction of an occupation. Professionalism encapsulates all the activities of a profession from the training courses of educational guidance and counselling, the graduates can best serve as educational consultants outside teaching and learning.

In conclusion, counselling today is yet to fully stand her foot as a profession. As at today, they can only be confined to the classroom environment where they can teach the content and rudiment of the course while concerted efforts have to be made to make them professional.

In View of Aforementioned, the Following Recommendations are Made

- Counselling is for all people and for all professionals. Therefore, to fully make it to reflect this philosophy, there is the need to review the syllabus to reflect all professionals and the training of the counsellors to specialise in the various specialities so that all can benefit.
- For now, many homes, families and even organisations do not know of it. That is they have no knowledge of its existence not to talk of even patronising it. Therefore, enough publicity should be given to it through the social media.
- Seminars, conferences and workshops should be organised in companies, military and paramilitary departments, hospitals, on the need for an effective service of guidance counsellors in such places to open their eyes to these essential services for maximum productivity job satisfaction and other several interventions on adjustment, etc.
- For now, the provision of counselling services as indispensable aspect of the educational system is a farce. Why they are not enforced? Majority of the government schools do not have them. Private schools are opened with the sole aim of merchandising education do not think of them even the national policy of education which spelt out counselling as an essential service needs a more purposeful and result – oriented review spelt out penalties for not keying to the provisions of the policy. For instance, it was spelt out that all teachers from primary to university should be professionally qualified. Are they so today? No.

- Efforts should be made to expose prospective counsellors to a very robust practical experience needed for professionalization. With these, the voyage for professionalization becomes realistic.

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