

School-Based Policies for Counselling Programme and Effective Ethical standards in Public Secondary Schools in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Many public secondary schools in Nigeria seemly do not have a well-coordinated and effective counselling programme for their learners. Most often the principal appoints any cool-headed or pious teacher to be in charge of the counselling department without proper and adequate training. The teacher assumes this dual responsibility without specific job description. For effective counselling in the best interest of Nigerian learners, a role description for school counsellor within counselling theoretical framework based on American school based policies; be it clinical, eclectic, or client-centre is direly needed in Nigeria. This study addresses the need of school-based policies to enable effective counselling programmes that call for proper implementation and ethical standards in Nigerian public secondary schools to function appropriately. It disclose slack of concrete therapeutic services as the main problem associated with counselling in secondary schools and presents a training and operational model to address this. The study recommends awareness, training, collaboration as well as an up-to-date record keeping of data in order to help students effectively to achieve their desired educational goals and a better quality of life.

Keywords: School-based, policies, counselling, Ethical Consideration.

According to Omoniyi (2016) in *International Journal of Education and Research*, historically, the concept of therapeutic counselling within a public context is the newly arrived offspring of a movement which itself is barely 60yearsold in Nigeria. When the guidance movement began just after the turn of the century, the focus was on vocational services. These are designed to help pupils prepare for the world of work. The goal was to prepare students to develop interest in occupational and educational change. Guidance became concerned with helping the “college course” pupils to get into college and the “commercial and general course” (occupationally-focused) pupils to find jobs.

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Omoniyi (2016) explained that in Nigeria, several events led to the institutionalization of guidance and counselling in the secondary school system. Most prominent was the efforts of a group of Catholic nuns at St. Theresa's College, Oke-Ado, Ibadan, Oyo State. The sisters developed a career workshop for all the school's graduating students during the 1959 academic session, especially in the area of subject selection and job search. A major outcome of the workshop was the distribution of the much needed career information that enabled 54 out of the 60 graduating students to gain full employment upon their graduation. The 54 students later in 1962 came together to form the Ibadan Careers Council. Some other careers councils of cities sprang up in different parts of the country (e.g., Enugu, Kano, Kaduna) which latter emerged to form the nucleus of the Nigerian careers council published a journal known as *Careers*. The activities of the council helped in no small measure in the growth and development of guidance and counselling in Nigeria (Omoniyi,2016).

The journal inspired the Federal Government of Nigeria to develop a workshop on guidance and counselling in schools. Through these efforts, the Federal Government was able to recruit people to begin training them as counsellors. This led to the establishment of the Counselling Association of Nigeria in 1976 as an affiliation of the American Personnel and Guidance Association (APGA). The Federal Government then inserted the need for guidance and counselling services and courses in our schools in its National Policy on Education by 1981. This then led the state governors to establish guidance and counselling units in their ministries of education, in addition to counselling units in the universities (American Counseling Association, 2016).

Apparently what is offered in schools is guidance and giving of advice but not really practical counselling. Okpalaenwe (2014) asserted that the guidance counsellor was an “advice giver;” they “guided and moulded,” gave direction, were perceived as a source of occupational and educational information, were an “expert” who knew the answers and told the client what to do, when to do it, and how to do it. This concept of guidance became firmly engrained. The image of the counsellor as one who, if they do not know all the answers, know where to get them is still prevalent among Nigerian parents, teachers, pupils, and administrators (Okpalaenwe, 2014).

As a vocational service, guidance entails vocational and consumer education for large groups in Nigeria. The basic assumption of vocational guidance, of course, is that pupils can solve their vocational and educational problems by receiving appropriate advice and accurate information (Makinde, 2014). It is a service that operates primarily on the cognitive level. Although behavioural sciences such as anthropology, sociology, and psychology have made significant theoretical contributions to the guidance movement (Davis, Campbell, Zoe, Hobbs, & Michie, 2015).

Their influence was seldom reflected operationally in counselling practice in most of the secondary schools in Nigeria. Due to the traditional vocational function assigned to guidance,

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administrators came to view the guidance counsellor as a dispenser of information. This view was due to the literal interpretation of the word “guidance”, by(Wambu, 2015). Odemelam and Uwani (2009), Mogbo, (2005), and Shertzer and Stone (1981) indicated that guidance means to guide, inform, direct, watch over, aid and assist students regarding making choices, adjustments, and problem solving in teaching and learning situations. The individual is assisted to understand, accept and use his abilities, aptitudes and interests to achieve his goals and aspirations. Fafunwa (1990) supported the idea by saying that a mandatory student Guidance and Counselling Service should be established in all Nigerian Institutions of Higher learning. He argued that through such services, the true conditions of the Nigeria Economy and its ever-increasing labour market demands will be met by students as employees. The employers of labour in both the formal and informal sectors of the economy will also benefit from it (Omoniyi, 2016).

It is not clear if there are any school-based policies that are being implemented for counselling program in Nigeria. However, not a single tertiary institution or university is offering courses in professional counselling, except guidance and counselling, and/or psychosocial counselling offered in some colleges(Makinde,2014). This explains that trained personnel in this field are not readily available across the country. Although some teachers are trained as counsellors, they perform the dual job of counselling and teaching as well.

World Education News and Review (2017) asserted that the Nigerian educational program system has three aspects: instruction, administrative services, and pupil personnel services. Instruction is the focus and the teacher, whose primary aim is to teach, holds a key position in the school. Administrative services are provided for the purpose of facilitating the instructional programme and supporting the teacher in their instructional role(Cherry 2017). In the same vein, pupil personnel services are facilitative and are designed to assist each student receive the maximum benefit from the in-structural programme. The school counsellors are members of the educational team and their main duty is to provide counselling (Mogbo,Obumneke-Okeke,&Anyachebelu, 2011).

According to Inskipp (1996) a counsellor is not an administrator, a disciplinarian, a teacher, a theoretician, an attendance officer, or a clerk in an office. Therapeutic counselling operates primarily on the affective level and not cognitive level, and is concerned with the emotional elements of human behaviour (Okpalaenwe, 2014). Okpalaenwe went on to say that in this context, therapeutic counselling is a process which occurs with normal youngsters who bear the typical challenges of adolescence. The client-counsellor relationship is therapeutic in that it facilitates the client’s emotional maturation. A therapeutic association between a client and a counsellor has great value because of its preventive nature.

Translating the theory of client-centeredness into practicality of the school situation demands that certain organizational procedures be established in order to create an atmosphere in which the program has an opportunity to develop(Vostanis, 2017).

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Counsellors should meet regularly to discuss the necessary procedures in initiating and implementing a professional counselling program. Steps on the possible outcome should be discussed among other things. Counsellors must be trained to practice in a professional and competent way (American School Counselor Association, 2008).

The primary aim is to furnish students with a quality counselling service. Teachers can help by encouraging students who have vocational, personal and psychological challenges to contact counselling department for assistance. Students at some point may miss a lesson but not many periods in any particular subject. Working hand in hand with teachers makes it possible (Vossler, 2017).

Practical Experiences of Counsellors in the School Setting

The development of a meaningful counselling programme hinges upon the ability of the counsellor to foster healthy interpersonal relationships not only with students but also with parents, teachers, and administrative personnel. Relationships between the school administrator and the counsellor can greatly affect the counsellor's role and image and thus the success of the school's counselling service. The training, professional competence, and willingness of the counsellor to counsel is very important. The attitudes of the administrator, particularly the school principal, towards counselling can mean the difference between the counsellors' functioning as a professional person and the counsellor's playing a non-professional role (Rogers, 1951).

On the one hand, the counsellor could be cast in an administrative role as a 'trouble shooter' (Abdullahi & Onasanya, 2010). In the Nigerian context, from the experiences shared by some guidance and counselling personnel who played dual role in schools, their primary responsibilities other than helping pupils select courses of study would be the discharge of residual administrative, faculty, and secretarial tasks. Such tasks include instilling discipline in school, clerical work, substitute teaching, lunch room supervision, and various others tasks which are not considered professional guidance functions, let alone appropriate counselling activities. Non-professional roles are the roles which counsellors are not trained professionally, but may be asked to do them.

Alternatively, the counsellor could offer counsel and do little else. The service should be characterised by trust and acceptance and focus on students' growth and self-actualisation. Counselling practice would reflect philosophical principles, theoretical considerations, and the empirical evidence of counselling research (Vossler, 2017). Practice would have a high degree of correlation with theory (American Counselling Association, 2017). Perhaps, if the operational role and image of each counsellor were located on a continuum ranging from the non-professional role at the lower extreme to the professional role at the upper end, the majority of counsellors would fall about halfway between the two extremes. In Nigerian schools, many teachers who are not professionally trained as counsellors found themselves in the scenario described above (Okpalaenwe, 2016).

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Administrator's Orientation

Gibbons, Diambra, and Buchanan (2012) said that Administrative attitudes toward counselling are influenced by the school leader's orientation. The difference in orientation between the counsellor and the administrator is quite marked. The administrator is primarily concerned with the efficient functioning of the school as a learning community and societal institution. Their conception of counselling is influenced and conditioned by their concern with the total operation of the school and their responsibility to faculty, parents, and the community as a whole.

Since their focus is on total school needs, they plan a schedule and programme which meets the common needs of all students. In contrast, the teacher and the counsellor are primarily concerned with meeting the individual needs of each student; the teacher on the cognitive level, and the counsellor on the affective level, within the programme framework developed by the administrator (Sanders, 2008).

The counsellor's focus is the individual. School counselling is a unique and specialized service designed to meet individual needs that cannot be met in the classroom. However, in the interests of developing an optimally functioning schedule and programme, the administrator often assigns the counsellor responsibilities that hopefully help the school to fulfil the group needs of the student body. Such responsibilities are often incompatible with the counsellor's paramount concern, the pupil's welfare.

Counsellor – Administrator Relationship

Another incubator of unfavourable administrative attitudes is the counsellor-administrator relationship. Roeber, Smith, and Erickson (2008), specified how the development of a counselling position in a school might pose an intimidation to the principal. Roeber, Smith & Erickson (1955), went on to say that before engaging the counsellor, the principal plays an omnibus and to some degree omniscient role. They are the unchallenged leader of instructional and personnel activities in his school. They are jack-of-all-trades, playing a paternal role to students and teachers alike. If they wanted to be autocratic, they could, because there is no one to threaten their status in the school.

Counselling activities are such that they cannot be as closely supervised, as are those of teachers. The counsellor may have facilities somewhat comparable to the principal's. Some parents and other members of the community may bestow a generous amount to status on the counsellor because of the national spotlight on guidance. All these factors may cause feelings of discomfort and perhaps even insecurity in the administrator (Roeber et al., 1955).

Lack of Role Definition

The fact that the counsellor's role has not been clearly defined in Nigeria is probably the major reason administrative attitudes become an obstacle in the development of professional school counselling. Okpalaenwe (2014), explained that it is difficult for an administrator to have

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positive attitudes toward the process of counselling, when that process has not been defined in terms of a role and job description. Okpalaenwe went to say that too often, the counsellor's job description is defined by the principal, other educators, citizens' committees, and ironically not by the counsellor, who is the professional in his or her area.

Looking at the historical review of counsellors in Nigeria, Makinde(2014),asserted that the duties of the counsellor depend presently upon the perceptions and feelings that the administrator has regarding the function of the odds and ends to the counsellor. Unfortunately, in Nigerian schools, far too many counsellors have been willing and even delighted to play a quasi-administrative role.

For a diversity of motives, then, there is a wide gap between the professional counsellor's view of counselling and the administrator's view. The evidence of research by Edward (2014),demonstrates that counsellors are not functioning professionally and that administrators conceive the responsibilities of the counsellor as being advice giving, dispensing of information, clerical work, supervision, and administration.

The Role of Counselling Association of Nigeria

Developing a professional identity is in line with the role of Counselling Association of Nigeria (CASSON). It is an umbrella body for education counsellors in Nigeria. It is building a remarkable knowledge management system that will encourage information sharing amongst members and non-members (Counselling Association of Nigeria, 2018a).The practice of counselling as a helping profession is recorded in many books that have been written by the founding leaders of the Counselling Association of Nigeria.

Much of the history captures how Reverend Sisters at St. Theresa's College, Ibadan Western Nigeria in the 1950s and 1960s institutionalized the events of Careers Day for students as a platform for motivating them for appropriate career choices (Makinde, 1986). The efforts of Rev. Sisters later brought the training of career counselling practice in schools across the then Western Region of Nigeria (Omoniyi, 2016).

The Association served as the foundation for the various bureaucratic initiatives in the Federal Ministry of Education in the 1980s, resulting in the recognition of the need for school guidance and counselling programmes in the Nigerian National Policy on Education (SE Okon, 1983). According to Okocha and Alika (2012) The Association presently is trying in its effort to developing professional identity involves a consideration of a counsellor's personal philosophy through conferences and workshops. Counselling as a psychological relationship is a process which reflects the counsellor's philosophy of life. That is, counselling is not a technique but a way of life, a way of living. Each counsellor must resolve certain basic questions regarding the nature of humanity and the world in which the lives before they can communicate effectively with clients(Okocha & Alika, 2012).

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If counsellors begin to think about their philosophy of life, they may find themselves experiencing self-therapy (Johnson, 2014). This is what the Association hopes to achieve in the future so that its members will be committed in counselling services in Nigeria (Aluede, 2004).

Omoniyi (2016) emphasised that developing a philosophy of counselling in Nigeria is followed by counselling procedure consistent with the philosophy and accordance with the ethical standards of the association. If counsellors decide to become an analytic counsellors because this type of counselling best reflect counsellor's philosophy of life, the procedure will be based on a professional rationale. This professional rationale consists of the research and experience of the analytic counsellors in the field synthesised with their own research and experience. Makinde (2014), asserted that the counselling procedure will not be a composite or mixture of methods used because they seem to get good results. It will be based on research and may be modified and refined in the light of new research.

Surbhi (2016) indicated that if counsellors develop a professional identity, operates consistently according to the identity, they have a source of strength. In their relationship with teachers, parents, and administrators, they will consistently be professional counsellors. As professional counsellors who have a clear concept of their role, they will have the courage to question and discuss with Administrator on their practices and duties. If they do not attempt in a professional manner to remedy those situations, which are incompatible with their role, it may be that they do not want to be professionals.

Democratic School Setting

An ideal counselling programme is realised when professional counsellors can function in a democratic setting under the leadership of a secure and democratic administrator (Koopman & Misner, 1990; Stickel, Satchwell, & Meyer, 1991). What are democratic administrators? They are those who have strong faith in the willingness, sincerity, maturity, and competence of their staff to solve problems, to make changes, and to determine policies. They strive to bring out the potentialities of their staff by creating an atmosphere conducive of staff growth. They have respect for the integrity and worth of each individual (Gordonas cited in Rogers 1951).

They are willing to recognise leadership in others and allow others to take over leadership functions. They listen to and try out, if practicable, any well-thought-out proposal of a faculty member. They are willing to wait patiently for the more sure results, which come from democratic interaction; they do not seek the 'expeditious' and 'more efficient' results of authority. They are more concerned with the growth of individuals than with freedom from annoyances. They have confidence in human nature and the creativity of all individuals (Diamond, 1990). Such a leader is a safe person having self-confidence and confidence in the democratic processes. In fact, it might be said that the degree to which an administrator is democratic is in proportion to the degree to which they are secure person and that the more insecure one is, the more autocratic they are.

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In a democratic setting, there is minimal dependency upon the administrator. Dependency inhibits a free flow of ideas and self-confident behaviour; authority produces reactive rather than creative behaviour. People are reluctant to ‘show their ignorance’ in the presence of an expert, or of the well-informed person. In order to be themselves, to participate freely, and to express their ideas and feelings to others, they must feel secure and free from threat (Makinde, 2014).

Makinde (2014) continued, a democratic setting is characterised by a non-threatening psychological climate, by freedom of communication, and by the opportunity for participation. There is a free exchange of ideas. This means that group action grows from the needs of the group and is not imposed from without or from above. Common agreement is achieved through the interaction of different kinds of individuals and ideas.

Similarly Koliba (2000) argued that a democratic atmosphere is conducive to change and encourages experimentation. In a public school, democracy encourages teachers to be creative and to bring forth new ideas. Teaching and learning techniques are re-examined; curriculum is re-evaluated; new policies are determined, not because an administrator wants these things to be done, but because faculty members see a need for innovation and are self-actuated to bring about change.

According to Foundation of Education (2018) in a democratic atmosphere, teachers often meet the needs of students. There is greater group cohesion and greater group productivity; there is more of a “we-feeling” among faculty members; and there is greater variability and flexibility of behaviour. Teachers are given the opportunity to take responsibility and exercise leadership. Furthermore, in a democratic atmosphere not only can a counsellor function most effectively but teachers can also operate professionally and with optimal efficiency. This is stage of efficiency is yet to be achieved in Nigerian colleges as some teachers need counselling professional training (Okpalaenwe, 2014).

Neely (2011), writing in the *Effective Educator*, asserted that when the professional staff members of a school can function in a democratic setting, then more meaningful learning should occur. Educational objectives developed to meet common needs and individual needs should be more easily attainable. Freed from a dependency relationship, staff members should be able to do the best that which needs to be done in terms of meeting the needs of the learner.

Counsellor as a Resource Consultant

In a democratic setting, the professional counsellor has the opportunity not only to counsel students with optimal effectiveness but also to aid the administrator and to contribute to the total school programme. They do this by serving as a resource consultant on human development to teaching staff, administrators, and parents (Kauffman & Landrum (2013).

Counsellor as a Testing Consultant

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The counsellor can assist teachers to understand the strengths and the limitations of testing and thus to use test results more effectively, for classroom purposes (Buhere, (2016). When teachers clearly understand the assets and weaknesses of tests and realise that test information is helpful when used purposively with other information, tests can become useful instruments in strengthening educational programmes. The appropriate employment of tests will help to foster the concept that students vary widely in their capacities, abilities, backgrounds, and interests (Dunlosky et al., 2013).

Counsellor as a Curriculum Consultant

In most schools, counsellors are involved to some degree in curriculum via the vehicle of testing. However, regardless of whether they use tests or not, counsellors are also involved in the curriculum because they are concerned with the needs of individual students and are conscious of what the school is or is not doing to fulfil these needs. The school counsellors can work with other professional staff members in seeking greater flexibility within the curriculum to meet the needs of individual students or groups of students (Devoss & Stillman, 2011).

The contribution school counsellors can make in individualizing the curriculum is great, but it must be remembered that they are interpreting students' needs and feelings and the teachers are interpreting subject matter. Only by mutual discussion and effort can advantageous changes take place (Williamson, 2013). Through such discussion, the counsellor can introduce a psychology of learning and personality, which can play a significant role in curriculum development.

Counsellors can also provide in-service educational programmes in which the faculty through group-centred leadership develop new insights regarding not only adolescent behaviour and development but also their own attitude.

Counsellor as a Resource Consultant to Parents

Abubakar (2012) emphasized that counsellors can perform their consulting role for parents much as they do for teachers. That is, they can counsel parents, help them better to understand adolescent behaviour, and interpret the counselling programme. Many of the problems that students experience are rooted in a troubled relationship between the student and one parent or both parents. Parents contact the counsellors to discuss students' problems or family relationships. In such situations, the school counsellors have opportunity to help parents express their feelings.

Abubakar (2012), indicated that counsellors are in a good position to clarify parental misunderstandings regarding typical adolescent's behaviour and to contribute new understandings for adolescent's growth and development. Sometimes, parents express negative and hostile feelings, but by accepting these and not assuming a judgmental role, the counsellors can help to mollify them. Parents may request information that have been given by students in the counselling session. However, no one would dispute the natural right of parents (Devoss &

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Stillman, 2011). The rights of the students must be sort by counsellors to break confidentiality (Okpalaenwe, 2016).

School Counsellor's Real Function

Within the Nigerian context, school counsellors' functions may include the following:

1. The school counsellor engages in professional counselling with individuals and groups of students to help them empower themselves to change and to cope. They provide an environment conducive to counselling in which students can deal with their issues openly and effectively, thereby improving their ability to profit from the instructional programme (Kauffman & Landrum, 2013).
2. Counsellors motivate students to seek counselling of their own preference through creative and continuous needs assessment programme. In order for students to make the best use of the counselling services, the counsellor must develop a positive image in their minds concerning their role as a professional counsellor (Okpalaenwe, 2014).
3. Counsellors conduct research designed to measure the effectiveness of individual and group counselling and other guidance services in promoting the maturity and educational development of students (Devoss & Stillman, 2011).
4. They provide informational services to students designed to meet their need for educational, vocational and person-social data. It also assist in providing testing services designed to help each student appraise their capacities, achievements, interests, and adjustment (Okpalaenwe, 2014).

Functions Outside the Role of the School Counsellor

The development of a meaningful role concept of the professional school counsellors in Nigerian schools should be clear and not contradictory. Counsellors should have valuable time to perform counselling duties. Counsellors need to not engage in some of the activities below, some Nigerian counsellors presently engage in:

- Counsellors should not have administrative duties such as: discipline students, providing parents with academic reports, issuing failure reports to parents, arranging for transportation, planning and conducting field trips. Except for vocational information, counsellors should also not provide orientations for students, approving or disapproving course transfer of students, and administrative policies (Okocha & Alika (2012).
- Counsellors should not have instructional, tutorial, supervisory duties, such as substitute teaching, remedial tutoring, study hall supervision, cafeteria supervision, and hall patrol. They should not be involved in scheduling classes or arranging academic programs, checking attendance, or serving as a truant officer. They should not have clerical duties that stop them from devoting their full time to professional activities. These clerical duties include: screening incoming phone calls, recording routine information, preparing transcripts, scoring test data, filing scheduling parent-teacher conferences, and registering new students (Okocha & Alika, 2012).

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Use of Procedural Forms

In order for a counselling programme to move ahead with ease, it must have a clear operational structure designed for the particular locale in which it functions (Okpalaenwe, 2014). Schools are generally well organized, and a counselling programme, which expects to achieve a reasonable degree of environmental acceptance, must itself be operationally sound and fit within the framework of the daily routine of school life (Nassar & Spencer, 2018). For this reason three forms are proposed: Appointment Blank (see Figure 1), Counsellor's Counselling Report (see Figure 2), and Principal's Counselling Report (see Figure 3). These should support an effort to establish an efficient manner of carrying out the counselling programme (Pope, 2018). The purpose of the Appointment Blank is twofold:

- (1) It serves as a reminder to students that they have an appointment.
- (2) The teacher becomes aware of a student's whereabouts when that student has a counselling appointment.

APPOINTMENT BLANK
Date: -----
Teacher: -----
Please allow ----- of -----
To come to the counselling room periods -----today.
If this is not possible, please let me know immediately and I will reschedule the appointment.
Thank you Counsellor

Figure 1. Proposed Appointment Blank

After a student has left, the counsellor uses the 4 x 6 inch Counselling Report (see Figure 2) to make notations of the client's feelings and attitudes during a particular session. This is for counsellor's private file and enables them to follow the frame of reference during the counselling sessions. The issues discussed are recorded in student's report card in Categories A – Z. This is a report card that contains the different problems clients present when they come for counselling. They are categorised and coded in Alphabetical order and counsellors use the codes to describe the issues they had with clients when writing a report.

COUNSELLOR'S COUNSELLING REPORT
Date -----
Client's code ----- Categories ----- Sign-----

Figure 2. Counsellor's counselling Report

The 3x5 inch Principal's Counselling Report (see Figure 3) is a statistical report designed to inform the principal of the counselling programme's trend. That is, principals may have the opportunity to discover the degree to which students are utilizing the counselling services available and the general area in which most of the counselling sessions occur.

PRINCIPAL'S COUNSELLING REPORT
Date-----

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Client's code -----	Categories -----	Sign -----
Requested by student -----		
Referred by -----		
Routine -----		

Figure 3. Principal's Counselling Report

This is a referral card. 'Requested by student' shows that the counselling session took place because of a self-initiated desire on the part of the student. A referral may come from a teacher, administrator, parent, or agency. In the established client-centred school counselling programme, the problem of working with referrals is mitigating to a great degree if the counsellor image among students is non-threatening. Routine will indicate how many sessions before the referral. These are been practiced in some public schools in Nigeria (Okpalaenwe, 2014).

Confidentiality in Counselling

According to American Psychological Association (2017) confidentiality is observed during and after sessions. Counsellors are normally bound by the ethical law not to disclose any information about client to anyone without client's consent. This is clearly explained to the clients at the initial contact. There could be exceptions to confidentiality if needed and appropriate, counsellors may refer clients to another professional counsellor in order to provide the best care possible. However, in such situations counsellors may inform clients in advance and request the permission to release information. If counsellors unmistakably notices that clients pose a threat of harm or danger to themselves or to other people, they are permitted by the code of ethics to help prevent the potential harm from happening even if it means having to disclose some of the information clients shared privately in the sessions (Morgan & Maxwell, 2017).

THE ROLE OF COUNSELING IN ETHICS, MORALITY AND THE LAW IN NIGERIA

The Nigerian constitution and curriculum has no place for the guidance and counseling in form of decree representation. The much talked about 6-3-3-4 system by the government of Nigeria about the National policy of Education don't include the counseling programme in the system which is very important (Diamond, 2017). The guidance and counselling discipline in Nigeria have a code of ethics/ standard for practice and operation but not yet recognised by many organizations. It is still a challenge to know and accept the work of counsellors in Nigeria (Okpalaenwe, 2016). It becomes difficult for counsellors to know their area of specialization and limitation. It is difficult for counsellors to make referrals, to guidance counsellor, psychologist, clinical psychologist, mental therapist etc. There are role conflicts which need to be defined by code and ethics of professional guidelines/practice (Egbochukwu, 2008).

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Many people in Nigeria think that ethics has to do with a set of social agreements or a religious decree. In professional philosophy ethics is the study of what is good and bad. Generally, philosophical ethics concerns itself with discovering a system one may use to determine who or what is good or with evaluating systems that others have proposed. The body of rules and standards issued by a government is applied by courts and similar authorities (Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999). Law is the specialized form of social control familiar in modern, secular, politically organized societies (Diamond, 2017). The profession of counseling is governed not only by ethical standards but by legal ones as well. Legal refers to “law or state of being lawful, and law refers to “a body of rules recognized by a state or community as binding on its members (Shertzer & Stone, 1980; Diamond, 2017).

Ethics mean moral principles that control or influence a person’s behaviour or philosophical discipline that is concerned with human conduct and moral decision making (Osunbor, 2017). According to Akinade (2005) ethics are normative in nature and focus on principles and standard that governs relationship between individuals, such as counsellors and clients.

The autonomy of clients are respected during counselling in Nigeria. This principle refers to the promotion of self-determination, or the freedom of clients to choose their own direction (Constitution Amendment in Nigeria, 2017). This principle reflected in the Humanist Theory promoted by Carl Rogers (1961). He suggested that human being is an organism that constantly moves independently to find homeostasis in life, and therefore gained independence and autonomy. To display respects for autonomy, counsellors must acknowledge the right of clients to choose and act in accordance with their wishes, and a professional counsellors must behave in a way that promote autonomy. However, this principle is very much related to individualistic community (like Western community) of autonomy opposes the manipulation of clients against their will, even for beneficial social ends (Stadle, 1986). There is no adequate assessment tools readily accessible to school counsellors in Nigeria that are acceptable to all school administrators as of now (Counselling Association of Nigeria, 2018a). These are the issues that government and other stakeholders would look into in the future.

CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Many public secondary schools in Nigeria do not have organized school-based policies for counselling programme implementation and evaluation for the benefits of students. Some teachers are usually approached by the administrators to take up counselling duties without the adequate counselling certificate or proper in-service training for such activity. There are limited professional counsellors in schools. Based on this therefore, the authors recommend the following:

1. The Nigerian Educational and Research Development Council (NERDC) whose main task is to design and develop curriculum at all levels of education in Nigeria, needs to take counselling in schools as a priority. It should design a curriculum on counselling that is comprehensive enough. Counsellors should support the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of learning of the students. This will help to cater for the needs

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of students, and in so doing, reduce the challenges students encounter in school and the wider society.

2. The Ministry of Education is encouraged to take as its responsibility the training of counsellors. It should give adequate training to counsellors and employ them to different public secondary schools in Nigeria. This is because many public secondary schools lack trained counsellors.
3. School administration should support the work of counsellors in schools by providing them an atmosphere conducive to proper counselling sessions with students. They should also endeavour to send the counsellors for in-service training in order to update their knowledge on counselling the 21st century student. This is because many students are becoming more complicated with regard to the challenges they face in school and or at home.
4. Counsellors are encouraged to take their duties seriously. They should not combine counselling and teaching. This is because, in order to meet the needs of the learners, there is need for the counsellors to dedicate ample and uninterrupted time to the students. They should at all times keep up-to-date record of the students' endeavours in order to help them achieve their educational goals.
5. Students are encouraged to avail themselves for counselling sessions. This is because there are a lot of challenges that prevent them from meeting with the demands of their educational pursuit. They should take it as a duty to always share their challenges with the school counsellors in order to effectively come out of this predicament.
6. Counselling Association of Nigeria (CASSON) should set a standard that only trained and qualified counsellors can take up the role of counselling in schools at all levels. In addition, that the qualification should be from diploma level up ward so as to give a professional help to the clients.
7. Supervision of counsellors should be made mandatory for all levels: Primary, secondary and Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria. This should be the work of Counselling Association of Nigeria and The Nigerian Educational and Research Development Council.

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Conflict of Interest

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