

SCHOOL COUNSELLOR'S ROLES IN MINIMISING ADOLESCENTS' ATTRITION FROM SCHOOLS

Oyaziwo Aluede; Bridget N. Q. Ikechukwu

E-mail: oyaziwoaluede@yahoo.com

Department of Educational Foundation, Faculty of Education, Nigeria

Abstract

Counselling ways (rendering financial advice, providing encouragement, reassurances and support), which the school counsellors could adopt to help the school system minimize the increasing incidence of school dropout, were advanced.

Key Words: Prevention strategies; youth population; guidance

Today, Nigeria is faced with the task of nation building and education is one of the veritable instruments in realizing this nation-building task. The desire of most developing nations to develop their economics, democratize their political systems and assure all and sundry social justice, require among other things, the broadening of educational opportunities for their fulfillment. Formal education, which is synonymous with schooling, is as a matter of fact indispensable for national development. Hence the indiscriminate expansion of and the colossal investment in the formal school system.

In spite of the efforts of successive governments in developing nations especially Nigeria to indiscriminately expand and colossally invest in the formal school system, research (Ikechukwu, 2000) reveals that school drop-out rate seems high and calls for the attention of all and sundry. It is in the light of this, that this paper was aimed at the following:

1. To state the variables which predispose adolescents to dropout of school.
2. To suggest counseling ways that could help reduce the increasing incidents of school drop-out.

Factors predisposing adolescents to drop out of school

Ikechukwu (2000), in her study of the variables that may possibly predispose adolescents to drop out of school (personal characteristics, home factor, peer factor, finance factor, school factor and societal factor) came to an empirical conclusion that adolescents are predisposed to drop out of school for the following reasons:

1. Finance
2. Personal Characteristics
3. Societal Factor; and
4. Home Factor

Finance

Adolescents' attrition from the school system has largely been attributed to financial problems. Ansere (1982), Fafunso (1994), Okedara (1986), Sheet et al (1997) and Thomas (1997) contended that high cost of schooling was one of the factors that predispose those who cannot afford it to withdraw prematurely from school. Thus, children of privileged Nigerians have generous doses of material and cultural conveniences, attend the best schools, etc., while individuals from poor homes cannot afford such investments. The conditions even degenerate to the extent that their children find themselves out of school (Onwueme & Ugbor, 1994).

Personal Characteristics

Any adolescent has an opinion about the school and the opinion if negative, may make him/her to hate school and later dropout. Hence, Elliot and Voss (1974) noted that an adolescent may leave school as a result of some personal factors like illness, accident or physical disability or any external circumstances over which the adolescent has no control. An adolescent can also leave school even though he/she is intellectually capable but, because of low grades attributed to poor citizenship irregular attendance/or truancy and behavioural problems in school (Adedeji, 1985; Elliot & Voss 1974; Ikechukwu, 2000).

Societal Factor

The school is a kind of social group within the society. Hence, the society has some influences over the school, while the school in turn also has some influences over the society (Ozigi & Canham, 1978). Thus, when a society does not value education and places priority on other things such as wealth, orientation for security, success at all costs and status symbol (Animba, 1993), the child is likely going to hate school (Aluede, 1995; Ikechukwu, 2000).

Similarly, when society does not reward talents, creativity and ingenuity, children are bound to see school as irrelevant (Adedeji, 1985). Hence, Trust (In Ikechukwu 2000) observed the culture-conflict and racial alienation in the society which affects the school environment may increase drop out risk.

Home Factor

The home plays a very important perspective in the life of any child. Hence the home could inform the adolescents' decision to drop out of school. Accordingly, research (Adedeji, 1985, Carvantees, 1965; Fafunso, 1994; George, 1997; Ikechukwu, 2000) indicate that certain home characteristics can influence school children to drop out. These home characteristics include: unhappy family situation, more children than parents can cope with; poor homes thereby making it difficult to cater

for their children and thus making children to ultimately dislike school as they cannot get necessary school materials. More than these, is the fact that an over demanding parent may create fear in their children with regards to high standards and the fear of being reprimanded in case of failure may make them dislike school and in most cases prematurely withdraw from school (Adedeji, 1985; Aluede, 1999).

The role of the counsellor in minimising adolescents' attrition from schools

Ikechukwu (2000) has already posited that some factors predispose adolescents to drop out of school. These factors have elaborately been reviewed in this paper. Elsewhere, it has already been noted that inspite of the advantages of schooling and the efforts of successive governments in developing nations and particularly Nigeria to provide and encourage basic education for all, school dropout rate seems increasingly alarming. This in itself calls for urgent attention. Now that it has become very glaring that the problem of school dropout has gone beyond the competence and management of parents, teachers and school authorities, the other way to turn to is counseling – as a sound foundation for future academic, vocational, psychological and overall personal growth (Essuman, 1985). The purpose therefore is to supplement academic work and entire school life with a comprehensive programme geared towards a strategic objective of helping adolescents persist in school and obtain the maximum benefit of education. It is against this background, that counseling strategies are advanced to further strengthen the functions of school counselors who may be called upon to provide assistance to adolescents at the verge of dropping out of school, so as to be able to experience more success and gain more confidence to tackle the academic, social, emotional, physical and vocational problems which had hitherto lowered their self-concept.

1. Financial Factor

Financial factor has been posited to be among the variables that predispose adolescents to dropout of school. For an adolescent to be comfortable at school, the materials needed for learning should be provided for the adolescent by his/her parents or guardians. No wonder some potential professors may terminate their schooling at the primary or secondary school level because of lack of funds. It was in recognition of this problem that the federal government of Nigeria launched the universal basic education in 1999. The aim is to provide free education all through primary level to junior secondary level.

Unfortunately, this current basic education programme and similar programme or several countries as USA, Canada, Britain, Australia and South Africa to help educationally and economically disadvantaged youths enter, stay in and complete secondary and post secondary education have

very limited effectiveness. For this and similar financial problems, the counselor should be able to offer the following services:

- (i) Identify the resources available in the home or community;
- (ii) Provide information concerning financial assistance or identity information sources in the community.
- (iii) Render financial advice;
- (iv) Offer recommendations for national, state and community action that emphasize empowering children and their families to break the cycles of poverty, abuse and high school drop out rate (Helge, 1993);
- (v) Provide information regarding scholarship, bursaries, students loans and other sponsorship opportunities;
- (vi) Assist students and parents to understand the procedures for applying to higher institution and for financing students' education beyond the senior secondary school levels; and
- (vii) Provide encouragement, reassurance and support to both students, parents and donor agencies.

2. Personal Characteristics And Home Factor

Personal characteristics of the adolescent and home factor have been posited to influence adolescents' decision to dropout of school. Such personal characteristics of the adolescent that make him/her dropout of school include academic underachievement, behavioural problems, physical disability and emotional problems. Furthermore, some adolescents lack the basic skills, knowledge and motivation to take responsibility for their life planning. Similarly, parents involvement in their children's education has been well established as an important component of academic success. Accordingly, Shaffer (1989) reported that lack of parental monitoring of an adolescent's activities, is an important contribution to deviant and antisocial behaviour. More importantly, parents at times complicate an adolescent problem by violently rejecting the youngster who already failed in school instead of giving an understanding and support to help the child develop academic skills and emotional confidence which the adolescent ordinarily may not know how to improve.

As counselors, we must understand that consultation with parents or guardians with the principal's support over students' personal and emotional problems that are family based is very necessary. The aim is to strengthen positive family encounters by consulting and laising with parents on students' personal-social matters and problems, and involving the parents with counseling programmes, so that family members will learn how to help rather than harm one another. By so doing, a deviant child may learn how to cope more adaptively with the world. The counselor therefore, should be able to offer the following services:

- i. When a need exists for a counselor to go beyond the data that can be provided by the adolescent, the counselor should examine inter-family relationships and the home life's dynamics (Santrock, 1981).
- ii. administer standardized and locally adopted psychological tests for diagnosis of emotional problems and facilitate vocational guidance;
- iii. Identify abnormal and disturbed adolescents and also those students who have remedial needs on both academic and non-academic areas (like speech therapy), plan and organize a programme of needed remedial service to in the school;
- iv. Coordinate the students' various remedial services and assess their effectiveness, monitor and obtain reports on the progress of the remedial services;
- v. Feel free to make referrals of students with more than normal counseling needs to the appropriate agencies, e.g., psychiatrists, audiologists, clinical psychologists, rehabilitation psychologists and special education experts since counselors are not omniscient (Nwabuoku & Ijeh, 1999);
- vi. Collect educational and occupational information and make them available to students regularly;
- vii. Match students to courses, identify students of the risk of dropping out, induce and nurture students by methods that can help adolescents settle in school and curb attrition.

Furthermore, counselors should seek to serve as an agent to the students by interpreting the students' needs, seek needed changes in the educational system and serve as an understanding with adults who provide a confidential relationship using appropriate counseling skills. All these are in the bid to retain students in school and minimize their' attrition.

3. **Societal Factor**

Societal factor has been posited by Ikechukwu (2000) to be one of the variables that predispose adolescents to dropout of school. This is so when a society does not value education (including talents, creativity and ingenuity but places premium on other things such as acquisition of wealth at all cost, status symbol and possession of material things). Thus, the student is likely to hate school. For instance, the issue of advanced fraud (Popularly called 419) is largely carried out in Nigeria by some school drop out. Worst is that, rather than the society frown at wealth accumulated by fraudulent means, the practice is that the society showers praises on these people especially because of their wasteful spending. There is therefore, a need for value orientation and clarification, this is where the counselor should come in. To ameliorate these problems, the counselor should be able to offer the following services.

1. The counselor together with other professional and organizations (such as church leaders, teachers, welfare officers, etc.) should make efforts to shift the value of people from conspicuous consumption, idleness, lack of devotion and reflection to thrifts, inventiveness and creativity, adventure and a more moral and reflective attitude (Izundun, 1991). This can be achieved through talks, seminars, workshops, pamphlets and posters.
2. Provide a communicative atmosphere that will give the students an opportunity to become involved in the discovery, processing and synthesizing of the right value.
3. Guide and counsel the Parents Teacher Association (PTA) through informative services, workshops, talks, etc.
4. Identify potential community referral sources to the school counseling services; and
5. Provide parents with information about school policies, procedures, course offering, educational and occupational opportunities as well as the requirements and the resources that can contribute to the fullest development of their children.

Furthermore, many students these days see schooling as irrelevant due to the economic down turn in the country which had led to hardship and unemployment for those who went to school. It is obvious from the look of things that the period of hardship has come to stay (at least for sometime). The best thing to do therefore, is to find a means of adjusting to the situation and learn to cope with it. The onus does not only fall on the government to improve the living standard of the people, Nigerians also need to make personal sacrifices, and this is where the services of a counselor is required. It is on this note that one of the fundamental considerations in the counseling enterprise is the issue of societal values. Thus, it becomes imperative on the counselor to help instill on students and the general populace the values which will permit individuals to endure the pains of a particular situation and look beyond immediate pleasure. The need for this recommendation is enhanced by the fact that values form the foundation of the common modes of operation of any society. Thus the survival and maintenance of any society depends on the transmission of essential value patterns, to its members. For this effort, counselor should be able to:

- (i) Start early to inculcate the values of hard work, dedication and sacrifices on students in particular and Nigerians in general so that they will be able to face the challenges of hard times; and
- (ii) Assist students to steadily readjust to changing times through enlightenment campaigns, talks, seminars, etc.

Despite the fact that research (i.e Ikechukwu, 2000) has indicated that school environment and peer influence do not predispose adolescents to dropout of school in Nigeria, we must understand that schools with cultures which make their environments as both supportive and

positive community are less likely to have their students withdrawing from school. Thus, as counselors, the following actions seem imperative.:

- (a) Motivate the massive “at risk” youth population to persist with education, and training through high school and beyond; and
- (b) Assist students to take responsibility for, and action toward their own career development, by providing academic counseling that will definitely reduce dropout rate.

Conclusion

It is a known fact that there is a strong relationship between academic failure and later drop out behaviour, with certain mediation factors like low motivation, perception of peer rejection or extremely poor peer relations and negative conformity behaviour. There is therefore the need for schools to initiate programs featuring guidance, redirection, re-enforcement and encouragement. As counselors we should offer the following services.

- (i) conduct an annual orientation for the new and old students, as well as periodic orientation programmes for all senior students.
- (ii) Promote career education through organized visits to industries, institutions of higher learning and through guest speaker on career days;
- (iii) Organize group counseling sessions in classroom setting on subjects like self-descriptive value clarification, sex education, relaxation techniques, appropriate use of leisure and quality leadership;
- (iv) Organize career programmes that can improve motivation and instill knowledge and skill in career decision-making information, interviewing, networking and career planning;
- (v) Assess the social picture of students in terms of their social relations, social interactive process, social learning and development so as to provide some significant intervention.
- (vi) Organize career program for potential school dropouts. With such programs students who are likely to drop out of school may be induced to continue their secondary school education.

Finally, it is the hope of these authors that if counselors adopt these strategies, they will go a long way in reducing school wastage.

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