

COUNSELOR'S ROLE IN QUALITY ASSURANCE, INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY AND KNOWLEDGE GENERATION FOR INSTRUCTIONS IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS

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ABSTRACT

This study assessed the extent to which the role and contribution of counselors and information and communication technology contribute to quality assurance and knowledge generation in tertiary Institutions. This implies that knowledge already acquired should be evaluated and re-evaluated so as to be in line with the global expectations. The paper acknowledged that the main policy objective in education in tertiary institutions is to raise the quality of education at all levels in order to make the recipients of the system more useful to themselves and the society as well. Quality assurance in tertiary institutions is a goal to which learners, teachers, staff and school administration aspires to attain. The paper reviewed general strategies for quality assurance in tertiary institutions. To ensure quality in tertiary institutions, knowledge could be generated and disseminated through formal instructions by lecturers, counselors and other academic staff, the use of library, conference/workshops, internet and the print and electronic media. For effective knowledge generation and dissemination, the counsellor who understands the philosophy of the institution and the needs for learners, parents and the society at large need not be neglected.

Keyword: *Quality assurance, information and communication technology and knowledge generation.*

INTRODUCTION

The Digital Age and twenty first century in which we now live is regarded as an age of knowledge explosion. It is a new era which demands that the academic and administrative staff especially guidance counselors of tertiary institutions need to explore and improve ways to generate and disseminate information appropriately to enhance quality productivity in our tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Anekwe and Ifeakor (2012) opined that it is not only an era which presents knowledge as not only the dominant factor in education but also in economics, politics

and overall socio-cultural diathesis of every nation of the world. The knowledge- driven system of this contemporary world has created a novel situation commonly referred to as globalization. New technologies are constantly being developed providing undoubtful evidence that the age of knowledge and information is here to stay.

Education is vital to the development or revival of a nations' natural resources. Thus, the quality of education has a determinant effect on the intellect, talents, attitude, potentials and skills of the citizens. The Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2004) stressed that the main policy objectives in education in Nigeria therefore, is to raise the quality of education at all level in order to make the products of the system more useful to the society and to maintain education as one of the prime engines for development.

Globally, technology is advancing, therefore the need for knowledge update by guidance counselors is importance in order to meet up with the current global trends. Torunarigha (2012) was of the view that once knowledge is created and stored, there is need for such knowledge to be updated so as to keep abreast with the global trends, otherwise, such knowledge becomes obsolete. Therefore, it becomes pertinent that for guidance counselors to remain sound in knowledge, they need to constantly avail themselves to the existing and reliable sources of information and knowledge update in their areas of specialty in other to guarantee quality assurance of education in tertiary institutions.

QUALITY ASSURANCE IN EDUCATION

The term "Quality" according to Adegbesan (2011) is not just a feature of a finished product or service but involves a focus on internal processes and output and includes the reduction of wastes and the improvement of productivity. Quality assurance in the education system therefore, is an umbrella concept for a host of activities that are designed to improve the systems

input, process and output of education (Okebukola, 2012). Quality assurance in the education system therefore, involves the process of monitoring, assessing and evaluating all aspects of the education activities and communicating the outcome to all concerned with a view of improving the products of the education system. Furthermore, Aworanti (2012) noted that quality assurance refers to the planned and systematic activities implemented in quality system so that quality requirement for a product or service will be fulfilled. Similarly, Yawa cited in Emeruoh (2012) notes quality assurance in education as all proactive measures adopted by a country to ensure that the system standard remain high enough to produce results set for it. Thus, quality standard in education is the bench mark that should guide the performance of the education system.

The Federal Ministry of Education (2009) remarked that quality standard in the education system are goals or targets to which learners, teachers, staff and school administration aspires to attain. Quality assurance in the education system therefore, is a multi-dimensional concept involving the various functions and activities of the education system. Such functions and activities include teaching, research, staffing, students, buildings, facilities and equipment, service to the community and academic environment. To complement this idea, Ofojebe and Ezeugo (2010) opined that quality assurance in education entails the quality of teaching personnel, quality of available instructional/teaching materials, equipment and facilities school environment and pupils, including quality of education delivery. It embraces functions and activities that will ensure quality of the academic (teaching curriculum) and structures (buildings, infrastructure e.t.c) that will allow an objective review of the quality of programme/instructional delivery. It is the determination of standards, appropriate methods and quality requirements by an expert,

accompanied by a process of inspection or evaluation that examines the extent to which practice meets these standards (Idris, 2012).

This underscores the fact that quality is the ability or degree with which a product, service or phenomenon conforms, to an established standard, and which makes it to be relatively superior to others. With respect to education therefore, it is the degree or ability with which tertiary institutions in Nigeria conforms to the established standard and the appropriateness of the inputs available for the delivery of the system. Quality assurance in tertiary institutions in Nigeria therefore, means the relevance and appropriateness of the programme to the needs of recipients and that of the nation in general. Thus, adequacy of various input resources will certainly exercise tremendous influence on quality assurance in Nigeria tertiary education system. Education stakeholders including students especially at tertiary level should play their expected role and realize that it is part of their own responsibility to pursue the quality assurance agenda. Thus, quality assurance is a key component of knowledge economy as well as successful internationalization. It is also a mechanism for building institutional reputation in the competitive local and global arena and a necessary foundation for consumer protection (NUC, 2004).

THE ROLE OF THE COUNSELOR IN KNOWLEDGE GENERATION AND DISSEMINATION IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS

Antecedents through wide range of observations has shown that academic and administrative staff and counsellors in higher institutions who transfer knowledge to the society are, therefore, expected to be involved in knowledge creation and capacity building through digital empowerment. Quality knowledge transfer can occur when guidance counselors improve their

skills and knowledge, learn to share information, create new and diverse information flow, and increase their interaction and ways of participation in information high ways.

Adams (2011) noted that the taste in education is carried and evidenced in its quality. Unless quality and functionality is assured in the system, education will lose out to nothing else. The author likened the Nigeria education system today to tasteless scenario and experience. Unfortunately, education in Nigeria in its present form is devoided from standard, quality and functionality (Balogun, 2012). In fact, much as most scholars are interested, everyone wants to obtain a certificate to join the band wagon in politics and possible “meet up early’. Today, politics is the most lucrative practice that makes sense’ and captures the interest of all and sundry. The quality and functionality especially in the Nigerian education system have further been slaughtered on the corridor of the struggle to obtain or secure a certificate as a meal ticket and further build prospect in politics.

Against these scenario Kadir (2012) observed that quality and standard need to be restored in the Nigerian education system. In this direction, Kadir (2012) further stressed that quality education have provided the ‘magic wand’ that transformed Russians in 1913 from an unbelievably fantastically backward country, poverty stricken into the world’s most technologically and economically developed countries. Again, Mungle (2013) on the same issues opined that quality and standard in education have transformed Japan into the third most industrialized nations in the world. In line with these observations, quality in Nigerian education system should focus on optimal development of skills, knowledge, values, attitudes, morals and capabilities of the recipients with emphasis on those relevant to the individual and Nigerian society. Thus, ensuring that these possible behaviour dispositions are maximally utilized for the benefit of the individual and that of Nigeria society as well.

To develop these skills, values, attitudes, morals and capabilities, it is one of the major role of a counselor to inculcate and infuse these traits just mentioned.

Knowledge Updated (KU) as explained in Torunarigha (2012) implies that the knowledge in question should also be evaluated and revaluated so as to be in line with the present activities especially in this information explosion era. The need for information and knowledge update become more compelling when one finds himself in a position where he is expected to impact some knowledge to others who are presumed to be less informed. A University guidance counselor, by virtue of his training and disposition, should be an embodiment of academic excellence, a model exhibiting some skills and competencies which he is expected to impact to others for greater effectiveness in his guidance and counseling services. As academics, the guidance counselors need to update their knowledge in their areas of specialty through a variety of sources. These might include, journals both international and national, textbooks, conference/workshops, information from the internet, researches, brainstorming and through information and communication technologies. In addition, Torunarigha (2012) stated that the university academics need to be versatile not only in his own area of specialization but also in other disciplines especially in Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) usage. For sound self-development and functional guidance and counseling services to students, knowledge of ICTs for KU is imperative, otherwise, the counselor might be at the risk of being termed, 'Computer illiterate guidance counselor' notwithstanding his academic rank.

The relevance of guidance and counseling services in Nigerian Universities should not be over emphasized. Some of these services which demands the use of ICT skills for knowledge generation as outlined in Odeleye (2017) and are also necessary for educational quality:-

a. Information/Educational Services: In guidance, the importance of information cannot be overemphasized. Without information, the entire programme is nullity. The success of any guidance programme is anchored on the free flow of information, not only between the professional counselling psychologist and the counsellee/client, but may also involve the significant others. Good information handling is therefore the sole responsibility of the counsellor.

To make well-informed choices, an individual needs relevant, adequate and valuable information about the issue for decision. Information is not only needed for decisions on educational or vocational areas of life, but also to other areas of life that make for its complexity. Such information should be current and useful. Information on health, careers, friendships, sex education, current affairs, study habits and others are expected to be routinely available with the counsellor. The counsellor's ability to get such information and make them available to his client(s) as at when due is a demonstration of his call to duty.

b. Planning & Placement Services: Aptitudes, attitudes and dispositions of the learners/individuals are examined with a view to placing them in the world of work (career) where their fullest potentialities would be tapped for their overall adjustment. Placement services facilitate putting the round peg in the round hole. In other words, such services help the individuals to be placed in the appropriate programme of studies or world of work in the face of the global turbulence and conflict today. The Counsellor's role is to assist individuals to develop and attain realistic goals in relation to their vocational and educational goals.

c. Orientation Services: This is usually carried out at the beginning of the school year or as a new student or staff joins the school. This exercise is to facilitate easy and comforting transaction from a familiar environment to a new setting. By so doing, the persons/students

are psychologically tutored and prepared for the challenges and demands of the new place.

The whole essence of the programme is to enhance positive adjustment of the individuals (students and staff) in their new environment.

Other services include; counselling services, appraisal services, referral services, follow-up services, evaluation services, research services, and socio-personal services. These services are not explained for want of space. However, it is doubtful if the counselors of Nigerian universities actually utilize the information and communication technologies (ICTs) for updating their knowledge, this underscores the need to verify the extent to which guidance counselors utilize (ICTs for KG). ICTs are viewed in Becta cited in Lawani (2008) as the computing and communication facilities and features that variously support teaching and learning a range of activities in education.

THE COUNSELLOR AND INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

The knowledge and skills acquisition in ICT is very necessary for the counselor to be empowered with these skills.

The rationales for guidance counselors to be using ICTs in discharging their duties are seen in the potentials which they can exhibit. ICTs have potentials of not only ensuring effectiveness and efficiency in these three areas (Educational services, vocational services and information services). They also have the potentials of easing the administrative duties of guidance counselors. When guidance counselors of Nigerian Universities update their knowledge through ICTs, the following below could be the benefits:-

- a. Preparation of current generation of students for future workplace that is, providing tools for tomorrow's practices.

- b. With counsellors' updated knowledge through ICTs, the university environment stands to be more efficient and more productive, engendering variety of tools to support and facilitate students' professional activities, for instance the effective use of various social media platform being explored by students.
- c. Knowledge generation through ICTs could be a means to reform and innovate teaching, that is, to stimulate learners to learn actively and independently in a self-directed way and/or in collaboration with others, for instance students can be counseled to have their own emails for successful academic exercise on campus.

Supporting the functional roles of ICTs for knowledge creation, sharing and knowledge generation, Anekwe and Ifeakor (2012) opined that the following as listed below could be achieved (1) data codification, storage and retrieval employing standard DBMS system, data transfer and communication by use of internet, E-mail, portals etc, E-communication and Online/virtual meeting points, specialized knowledge management systems for decision support.

CHALLENGES

In spite of the recognized rationales of ICTs for knowledge generation, there seems to be some challenges to their usage by the guidance counselors in Nigerian universities. Some of these challenges include, (a) inadequate ICT infrastructure including computer hardware and software in tertiary institutions, (b) lack of internet connectivity and lack of free access (c) guidance counselors, negative attitudes towards moving from traditional to digital era, (d) lack of sponsorship by the University for Attendance to conferences, workshops and (e) lack of technical support. These fact was supported by Bassey, Umoren Akuegwu, Udida, and Akpama cited in Ekpoh and Etor (2011) who noted that the level of provision of technological infrastructures in Nigerian tertiary institutions is significantly inadequate.

Nevertheless, researchers are optimistic that the above obstacles to knowledge generation could be surmounted if certain strategies are adopted. To this end, one would expect that provision of adequate modern technological facilities should be provided and allowing guidance counselors free access to them should help to a great extent for knowledge generation. Specifically, provision of Laptops at a very reduced price and modern that are fast in browsing might be a great motivation to guidance counselors for knowledge generation. Writing on the concept of motivation, Peretomode in Ofojebe and Ezugoh (2010) opined that motivation is the process of influencing or stimulating a person to take action that will accomplish desired goals. However, guidance counsellors' motivation should be a way of empowering them to effectively and efficiently carry out their services.

Again, it involves the perceptions, variables, methods, strategies and activities used by the management for the purpose of providing a climate that is conducive to the satisfaction of the various needs of the guidance counsellors, so that they may become satisfied, dedicated and effective in performing their tasks. Guidance counselors should be motivated for knowledge generation in order to boost their productivity, effectiveness, efficiency and dedication in performing their tasks. No doubt, motivation for the use of ICTs for knowledge generation will enhance quality assurance in education, quality guidance and counseling services and quality instructional delivery in the educational system. To appraise the knowledge generation among the guidance counselors of Nigerian Universities from South-south and South-East zones of Nigeria, the study sought to; determine the extent of utilization of ICTs for knowledge generation of guidance counselors, identify the rationales for guidance counselors usage of ICTs, the challenges to the use of ICTs and the extent of their motivation for the use of ICTs for knowledge generation.

The above objectives are laudable enough but the researchers are worried whether the guidance counselors have been using ICT skills for knowledge generation in this digital age. It might be that they are not fully aware of the rationales and challenges to the use of ICTs for knowledge generation. Also, the researchers are skeptical on the extent of motivation of guidance counselors for the use of ICTs for knowledge generation. With this state of mind, the researchers present the problem of this study pose as a question. How would the guidance counselor be motivated in the utilization of ICT to a high extent for knowledge generation in this digital era? Providing answers to this question is the crux of this paper.

CONCLUSION

A cursory look at the education system shows that the demise of quality especially in the system has been slaughtered on the corridor of the struggle to obtain or secure a certificate as a meal ticket. Quality need to be restored in the Nigerian education system. Thus, quality assurance in tertiary institutions is a goal or target which guidance counselors in collaboration with University management should encourage the integration of ICT into their counselling process, curriculum adjustment and teaching method in order to attain quality standard in the education system. On the other hand, internet services should be readily available and accessible, application and utilization of the ICT tools in guidance counselling services should be monitored to promote quality assurance in tertiary institutions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In tertiary institutions, the quality of education is the prime engine for the development of its education system. For this reason, this paper recommends that;

1. There must be continuous research and planning by guidance counsellors on the recent ICT tools needed to improve their guidance and counselling services.

2. Teaching and non-teaching staff should personally seek constant training for optimal development in ICT skills, knowledge generation, inculcation of morals, values and right attitude and the abilities to disseminate knowledge to ensure quality output in the educational system.
3. Government and all stakeholders in the education sector should provide adequate fund for the purchase of needed ICT equipment and consistently organize workshops, seminars and conferences for guidance counselors specifically to improve the quality of their services as well as the educational system.

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