

COUNSELLING FOR A CHILD FRIENDLY SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Education is fundamental human right and it is essential instrument in realising one's potentials. A key aim of education is to give all citizens the necessary skills and values to improve their quality of life. The primary school education is the foundation laying process that provides the child with the necessary environment and stimulus for learning how to acquire the knowledge of what he needs to cope with life, in proportion with his age, ability and aptitude, in his environment so that he can live a meaningful and useful life in the community. The consideration of the Child Friendly School (CFS) model begins with generic key principles that are subject to interpretation. It is generally agreed that the Child Friendly School concept as introduced in the 1990s was inspired by the principles of child rights as expressed in the CRC. As the ideological foundation of child friendly schools, the CRC gives rise to the generic or key principles that drive the process of making schools child friendly. Hence, the paper focus on concept of counselling, concept of child friendly schools, a framework for right-based child friendly schools, the concept of primary, child environment and among others.

Keywords: *Counselling, child friendly school, environment, primary.*

Introduction

The Child Friendly School (CFS) initiative in Nigeria was developed as a partnership between the Ministry of Education, UNICEF, and other national and international organisations in response to the dire state of education in Nigeria in Nigeria in the 1990's. Less than 80 per cent of school-age children were enrolled in school. About a third of that number did not complete primary school, while two-thirds did not achieve basic literary or numeric proficiency. Schools had inadequate classroom spaces, furniture, equipment and teaching/learning materials. Many of them had inadequate water, health and sanitation facilities, and there was very limited community involvement in education. Teachers were poorly motivated and used ineffective teaching methodologies. Hence this strategic partnership, which later became the Child Friendly School (CFS) initiative. It sought to create schools that reflect and realise the rights of every child, implement student-centred pedagogy, gender sensitive, promote students' mental and physical health; promote quality learning outcomes for all children, enhance teacher capacity, morale and

commitment and provide education that included families and promote community cohesion.

The purpose of child friendly schools and education systems progressively towards quality standards, addressing all elements that influence the wellbeing and rights of the child as a learner and the main beneficiary of teaching, while improving other school functions in the process. Quality standards should make it possible for all children to access school, survive from grade to grade and complete the cycle on time. They should also provide an enriched educational experience through which students can thrive, develop and achieved their full potentials. To his end, Child Friendly School (CFS) models are concerned with harnessing the full involvement and support of all parties in a position to facilitate children's right to quality education. These parties, or 'duty bearers', include parents, communities, teachers, school heads, education planners and civil society groups, as well as local and national governments and their external partners. Their involvement enables schools and education systems to provide the conditions and resources necessary for achieving the quality standards envisioned in the CFS models (UNICEF 2009). Schooling is one experience that most children worldwide have in common and the most common means by which societies prepare their young for the future. On any given day, more than a billion children are in primary or secondary schools, 689 million in primary schools and 513 in secondary schools (UNICEF 2006). They are in permanent or temporary buildings, tents or under trees sharing the experience of learning, developing their potentials and enriching their lives. But, schooling is not always a positive experience for some children because it can also means shivering in cold, unheated buildings or sweating in hot, airless ones. It can mean being forced to stand in unfurnished classrooms, hungry, thirsty or unwell. It can also mean being frightened by the threat of punishment, humiliation, bullying or even violence at the hands of teachers and fellow pupils (Olaleye 2012).

The Concept of Counselling

'Counselling' is more personal and interactive than guidance. It involves one-to-one or one-to-a group relationship between the client and the professional counsellor(s) in resolving his or her problem(s). Counselling has a wide range of procedures like advice giving, support in times of trouble or need, encouragement, test interpretation and information giving Ogbodo (2017). The dictionary definition stresses advice and mental exchange of ideas. A brief look at different definitions of counselling from different writers' perspective is provided below:

- Bulus (1991) defines counselling as "that process which takes place in a one-to-one relationship between an individual troubled by problems with which the he cannot cope alone, and a professional worker whose training and experience have qualified him or her to help others reach solutions to various types of personal difficulties.

- English and English in Okobia and Okorodudu, (2004) believe that the term 'Counselling' best described a relationship in which one person endeavours to help another to solve his/her adjustment problems. They believe that issues such as education, vocation and socialization include such main areas of adjustment among the adolescents and young adults in the society.

Concepts of Child Friendly Schools

As for scope, Child Friendly School (CFS) models embrace a concept of quality that goes well beyond pedagogic excellence and performance outcomes. The focus is on the needs of the child as a whole, not just on the 'school bits' that educators traditionally feel responsible for. The scope of a Child Friendly School (CFS) model includes multidimensional coverage of quality and a holistic concern for the child's need. (Edited form UNICEF document 2005) A child friendly school is a school where the environment is conducive, the staffs are friendly to children, the health and safety needs of the children are adequately met.

Child Friendly Schools

The scope of a UNICEF has developed a framework for rights-based, child-friendly educational systems and schools that are characterized as "inclusive, healthy and protective for all children, effective with children, and involved with families and communities- and children" (Shaeffer, 1999). Within this framework:

- i. The school is a significant personal and social environment in the lives of its students. A Child-Friendly School ensures every child is an environment that is physically safe, emotionally secure and psychologically enabling.
- ii. Teachers are the single most important factor in creating an effective and inclusive classroom.
- iii. Children are natural learners but this capacity to learn can be undermined and sometimes destroyed. A Child-Friendly School recognises, encourages and supports children's growing capacities as learners by providing a school culture, teaching behaviours and curriculum content that are focused on learning and the learner.
- iv. The ability of a school to be and to call itself child-friendly is directly linked to the support, participation and collaboration it receives from families.

Child-Friendly School aims to develop a learning environment in which children are motivated and able to learn. Staff members are friendly and welcoming to children and attend to all their health and safety needs.

A Framework For Right-based, Child-Friendly Schools

All social systems and agencies which affect children should be based on the principles of the convention on the rights of the child. This is particularly true for schools which, despite disparities in across much of the world, serve a large

percentage of children of primary school age. Such rights-based-or child-friendly-schools not only must help children realize their right to a basic education of good quality. They are also needed to do many other things, help children learn what they need to learn to face the challenges of the new century, enhance their health and well-being, guarantee them safe and protective spaces for learning, free from violence and abuse, raise teacher morale and motivation and mobilize community support for education.

A rights-based, child-friendly school has two basic characteristics:

- i. It is a child-seeking school – actively identifying excluded children to get them enrolled in school and included in learning, treating children as subjects with rights and state as duty-bearers with obligations to fulfil these rights and demonstrating, promoting, and helping to monitor the rights and well-being of all children in the community.
- ii. It is child-centred school- acting in the best interests of the child, leading to the realization of the child’s full potential and concerned both about the “whole” child (including her health, nutritional status, and well-being) and about what happens to children in their families and communities before they enter school and after they leave it.

The Concept of Primary

“The primary school education is the foundation laying process that provides the child with the necessary environment and stimulus for learning how to acquire the knowledge of what he needs to scope with life in proportion with his age, ability, and aptitude, in his environment so that he can live a good and useful life in the community. The National Policy on Education (2013) stated that primary education is the education given to children aged 6- 12 year. The objectives of primary education are to:

- a. Inculcate permanent literary, numeracy and the ability to communicate effectively;
- b. Lay a sound basis for scientific, critical and reflective thinking;
- c. Promote patriotism, fairness, understanding and national unity;
- d. Instil social, moral norms and values in the child;
- e. Develop in the child the ability to adapt to the changing environment and
- f. Provide opportunities for the child to develop life manipulative skills that will enable the child function effectively in the society within the limits of the child’s capability.

The Concept of Environment

Children do not exist in a vacuum. A child is as a matter of fact conceived in an environment and born, grows, becomes mature and dies in an environment. In other words, it means that human development is a journey that starts from one end of an environment and ends at the other end of it.

Environment therefore becomes an indispensable modifier of human development. Thus, for us to understand a child, his interests, dislikes and emotions, we must first and foremost understand his surroundings. According to Undiyaundeye, (2012) an educational psychologist defines environment as all factors, internal and external excluding heredity that influence human development from conception to death. For instance, to an educational psychologist, the stress a pregnant woman is exposed to that is capable of affecting the developing embryo is considered an environment, the eating habit among others.

Educational Benefits of Studying the Child's Friendly Environment

Many benefits are derived from studying child's friendly environment, most especially to counsellors and teachers. According to Undiyaundeye, (2012), these include the following:

- i. It makes a teacher a child-environmentalist, one who knows what surrounds the child and how the surrounding influences him or her.
- ii. It better places a teacher to serve as a good consultant to parents on child issues.
- iii. It helps the teacher understand how the child explores the environment for knowledge and therefore knows how best and what to impart to the child.
- iv. It actually equips the counsellors and teacher with the knowledge of the environmental needs of a child.

Counselling on How to Initiate a Child-Friendly School in Primary Schools

The National Policy on Education (NPE) (2004) also recognizes the importance of counselling in the improvement of the quantity and quality of education, as it is to help in the perspective and assist arrest the personality maladjustment among the school children.

For these two roles, the policy advocates for training of more counsellors and the in co-operation of guidance and counselling in teacher education programmes. The National Policy of Education (NPE) (2004) therefore states, "Proprietors of schools shall provide guidance counsellors in adequate number in each primary and post primary schools", in such a way to reflect an environment of good quality which include the following, that it should be inclusive of children in a way that it:

- i. Does not exclude, discriminate, or stereotype on the basis of difference.
- ii. Provides education that is free and compulsory, affordable and accessible, especially to families and children at risk.
- iii. Respects diversity and ensures equality of learning for all children (e.g. girls, working children, children of ethnic minorities and affected by HIV/AIDS, children with disabilities, victims of exploitation and violence).
- iv. Responds to diversity by meeting the differing circumstances and needs of children (e.g. based on gender, social class, ethnicity, and ability level).

It should be effective for learning in a way that it:

- i. Promotes good quality teaching and learning processes with individualized instruction appropriate to each child's developmental level, abilities, and learning style and with active, cooperatives, and democratic learning methods.
- ii. Provides structured content and good quality materials and resources.
- iii. Enhances teacher capacity, morale, commitment, status, and income – and their own recognition of child rights.
- iv. Promotes quality learning outcomes by defining and helping children learn what they need to learn and teaching them how to learn.

It should be healthy and protective of children in such a way that it:

- i. Ensures a healthy, hygienic, and safe learning environment, with adequate water and sanitation facilities and healthy classrooms, healthy policies and practices (e.g. a school free of drugs, corporal punishment, and harassment), and the provision of health services such as nutritional supplementation and counselling.
- ii. Provides life skills-based health education.
- iii. Promotes both the physical and the psycho-socio-emotional health of teachers and learners.
- iv. Helps to defend and protect all children from abuse and harm.
- v. Provides positive experiences for children.

It should be gender-sensitive such a way that it:

- i. Promotes gender equality in enrolment and achievement .
- ii. Eliminates gender stereotypes.
- iii. Guarantees girl-friendly facilities, curricula, textbooks, and teaching-learning recesses. Socializes girls and boys in a non-violent environment.
- iv. Encourages respect for each other's' rights, dignity, and equality.

It should involve with children, families, and communities in such a way that it is:

- i. Child-centred – promoting child participation in all aspects of school life.
- ii. Family-focused-working to strengthen families as the child's primary caregivers and educators and helping children, parents, and teachers establish harmonious relationships.

- iii. Community-based- encouraging local partnership in education, acting in the community for the sake of children and working with other actors to ensure the fulfilment of children's rights.

Implications for Counselling

These include the following:

- i. Counselling in the primary schools helps in preventing maladaptive behavioural attitudes of pupils before these become desperate and difficult to modify in adolescence.
- ii. Counsellors in primary schools offers opportunities for affective that the present cognitive oriented education in the school system.
- iii. Counsellor to collaborate with the school and community to establish good rapport between them.
- iv. Counsellor to offer mobilization and orientation services which will engender community's interest in schools of their localities with a view to taking effective ownership of such schools.
- v. Counsellor to offer orientation services to community members on full participation in solving the school problems/needs by raising funds for the identification and execution of projects.
- vi. Children at this stage are growing and are confronted with lots of developmental problems. The counsellor must be equipped in nature to provide intellectual, social, emotional, vocational, moral and spiritual assistance for this child. This will help in the overall development of the child.

Conclusion

For healthy child friendly school, it was concluded that counselling services should be made available right from primary school in Nigeria. Facilities and qualified counsellors and teachers should be able to handle these younger children. The primary school is the best period to develop most of the socially accepted behaviours, values and attitudes needed of community development. Hence, this paper discussed the concept of counselling, the concept of child friendly school, a framework for right-based, child friendly schools, counselling on how to help a child friendly school in primary, its environment and among others were treated.

Recommendations

The recommendations made included the following:

- i. More qualified counsellors and teachers to be employed for proper handling of these primary schools children in Nigeria.
- ii. Facilities for the teaching of these children should be made available by the three tiers of government (Federal, State and Local).

- iii. The schools should establish a very strong and viable committee comprising of stake holders having interest in developing their communities.
- iv. Stake holders to take active control of school activities by providing financial assistance for educational development.
- v. The government should promote capacity building for counsellors and teachers for children through seminars workshops and conferences.
- vi. Necessary infrastructures should be provided by the stakeholders to compliments the effort of the government.
- vii. There should be availability of adequate environmentally sustainable facilities, services and supplies that support the needs of the whole child and also of all children.
- viii. Stakeholders should collaborate with NGOs and Donor agencies for resource mobilization.

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