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The Role of guidance and counselling services in students' career decision making in secondary schools (case study of five secondary schools in Kailahun district, Eastern Province of Sierra Leone)

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated the role of guidance and counselling services in students' career decision making in secondary schools. The research was done to assess the extent to which guidance and counselling services has on students' career decision making in secondary schools in Sierra Leon. Guidance and counselling is a profession offered by a trained and qualified personnel who is knowledgeable and has the expertise to help pupils with their psychological and emotional problems. Decisions in career choice making have to be a skill that guidance counsellors must use to help students learn and understand how to make good career decisions. It involves a systematic procedures, processes and strategies which students can learn and make better use off by way of practice. This is the reason why the research tends to examine the services of guidance and counselling on career decision making of students in secondary schools. It also looked at the roles of guidance counsellors in students' career decision making in secondary schools. The study did a case study of five secondary schools in the Kailahun district eastern part of Sierra Leone. The techniques used to select the schools were simple random sampling to ensure fairness and honesty. The target population for the study was 190 respondents, comprising of 125 students,25 from each of the schools,5 principals and 5 vice principals from the 5 schools 50 teachers ,10 from each school and 5 guidance counsellors from the

five schools. Four sets of questionnaires were developed as follows, one set for principals and vice principals, one set for students, one set for teachers and one set for guidance counsellors. The other instruments used were group discussions, interviews and observation method. The data collected was analysed in descriptive form. The research proved that no guidance and counselling services that aided students in career decision making in all of the 5 selected secondary schools. It was eminent that the tools/ resources were not available or insufficient in all of the secondary schools. Finally summary, conclusion and recommendations were highlighted from the findings.

INTRODUCTION

The chief focus in guidance and counselling is helping individuals with proper career decision making for good future. Vocational counsellors explore and evaluate the individuals educational training, work history, interests, likes skills and personality traits. Counselling is a helping relationship in which one person the counsellor endeavours to help another person the client solve his /her problems (English and English, 1971, cited in Okebiah and Okorodudu,2004.)This art of helping relationship started when it was discovered that young people needed to be guided in their career decision making process. The counsellor may arrange for aptitude and achievement tests to help the individual make good career decisions in life. The issue of career decision making for students continuous to be a major problem for students. It is believed that one of the major benefits of counselling is that it helps the individual to develop, sustain a career and be adjusted in life (Obiunu and Ebunu, 2010). Guidance and counselling services is said to a curative measure in addressing such problem of students. The Ministry of Education and stakeholders believe that the guidance and counselling department is responsible for ensuring that the child becomes optically developed. The 1995 education Act emphasis the relevance of guidance and counselling services for the integral development of the individual. The lack of trained and qualified guidance and counsellors/teacher counsellors in schools has been a major factor that is causing ineffectiveness of guidance and counselling services in schools in Sierra Leone. An individual is worth, recognised and important in society when one has a good job and is well paid. This goes a long way not only for the individual alone but his family/relatives

as well. For most of the time, individuals' career/ occupational choice is decided by parents or manipulated by friends, relatives, teachers or information from some source. The process of finding the best possible match of an individual with a particular kind of job is career decision making. Dada [2005] claims that many youths do not know what to do when they plan to make decisions on career choice which lead them to taking the wrong job. Many youths go into jobs that they do not want due to the lack of career decision making. Ike [1997] says that many students do not know what to do with their lives and where to go after school. The school guidance and counselling services must help to develop the potentials of students and guide them against the requirements of different occupations. The career of the person is the job, occupation or work that one does for a living. The National career development Association 1993 noted that it is helping individuals increase understanding of their self interest, values and goals in a vital foundation of the career development process.[page 2] It is said that career development activities help students to develop positive work habits such as follow instructions/directions, complete assignment on time, set realistic goals and make informed choices/decisions and explore jobs. Counselling is said to be a helping relationship in which the guidance counsellor tries to help the client to solve his/her adjustment and psychological problems. Okebiah and Okorodudu [2004] emphasis that counselling is a person to person relationship in which the counsellee is helped by the counsellor to help increase understanding and ability to solve adjustment problems. Okonkwo [2011] says career is a series of jobs that a person has in particular area of work usually involving more responsibilities as time passes. Guidance and counselling focuses on the individual and it is required highly in colleges, schools and higher educational institutions, courts, hospitals, industries and everywhere. Frank Parsons was known as the father of vocational counselling. His efforts in guidance and counselling became an organised service and has gained great recognition for his contribution in society. Parson was the first to institute/establish the first career institution in the USA. The guidance and counselling movement developed into an organised services, which has continued to make a significant contribution to the development of society [Makinde, 1984, Nyamwange, Nyakan and Ondima 2012]. It has been proven that without a proper guidance and counselling service in a school, student's problems cannot be handled well

and career decision making would be achieved by students. Schools in Sierra Leone will not realise/ achieve the goals of the 6334 system of education except proper effective guidance and counselling services are carried out. The services of guidance counsellors must be given prominent attention. The increasing in unemployment rate of youths is a major factor for the poor career decision making of students because of the lack of proper and effective guidance and counselling services.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The 1995 Education Act emphasis the importance of guidance and counselling services for the integral development of pupils in schools. The 2004 National Policy on education states that education is an instrument for effective national development. This indicates that students in schools are expected to acquire the necessary skills and experience that help them to be fitted in the world of work upon graduation. A major turning point in anybody's life involves the career choice that he/she makes while in senior secondary school. However parental influence has been a major influence on the career choice of their children. (Roe 1987, Adigwe 1981, Okeke 1996, Gesinde 1986). Through proper and effective guidance and counselling services in the students career decision making, they are expected to help in national development. The services will help the students to contribute and benefit from the economic growth of the country /national development. Therefore, if students are not properly and effectively helped and guided in their career decision making, such students cannot or may not be able to contribute to economic or nation building. It is a fact that guidance counsellor and the services of guidance and counselling have not been given the due attention it deserves. As a result of this, students lack the knowledge on what to do, which course to choose and how to pursue the right courses for future occupation/ world of work. When these students are admitted into university, they find it very difficult to cope with other students who choose the right courses leading to their chosen career path[Okolie et al 2014]. Guidance and counselling services were established to aid students to develop competencies and skills to overcome difficulties and challenges in career decision making.

Purpose of the study

This study tried to assess the roles of guidance and counselling services in students' career decision making in secondary schools in Sierra Leone. The research will look at the available resources and the roles and attitudes of professional guidance counsellor in students' career decision making in secondary schools. It will also look at students' attitudes towards career decision making in schools.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The future of every country/ nation is in the growing youths or adolescence. The services of guidance and counselling is meant to assist individuals to understand themselves, to discover their likes, dislikes, interests ,capabilities and talents to prepare them for their own future and that of the country. It creates strategies for them to realize the importance of effective career decision making. The study will also bring out importance information to stakeholders so that they can put more attention to the services of guidance and counselling for students.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To examine the roles and attitudes of guidance counsellors in career decision making in secondary schools.
- To investigate the attitudes of students towards guidance and counselling services in career decision making in secondary schools.
- To bring out the challenges of guidance counsellors in students career decision making in secondary schools.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

This study was carried out in the Kailahun District at the eastern part of Sierra Leone. It is a descriptive/narrative write up that took the form of a case study of five secondary schools in the Kailahun city, Eastern part of Sierra Leone. The population of the study consisted of 190 respondents comprising of 5 principals, 5 vice principals, 5 guidance counsellors, one each from the five schools selected, 50 teachers ,10 from each school and 125 students ,25 each from a school. The method and technique used for selecting the

secondary schools used as a case study was through a simple random sampling for fairness and honesty. The study was concerned with soliciting information from secondary schools guidance counsellors, students, principals, vice principals and teachers to collect facts and information on the role of guidance and counselling services on students career decision making in secondary schools. The instruments that were used for this research were interviews, personal observations, face to face discussion with respondents. Four sets of questionnaires were developed as follows, one for principals and vice principals, one for students, one for teachers, and one for guidance counsellors. The types of questions used were closed and open ended questions. The data collected was analysed and results written in a descriptive /narrative way.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

VIEWS OF THE STUDENTS

The career guidance decision making process requires the individual to think carefully about his/her interest, talents, abilities and values. Usually what one is good at indicates ones career interest in life. Guidance and counselling has several components such as career guidance, personal and social guidance, orientation and planning and placement services to name a few. According to Whiston 2003, guidance and counselling assessment is to serve as the basis for information on the above services and as a placement for further education and work in the different stages of learning.

It is certain that students in schools face a lot of challenges and therefore have to make wise choices in subjects and other educational activities. They need to have the required basic skills such as how to study to be able to achieve and adjust them well in society, life, the country as a whole, peers and the world of work. It is a fact that personal growth, development and social interaction is the sole responsibility of teacher counsellors and other school authorities. Students interact, share information and knowledge with each other in schools.

About 38 percent of the students interviewed accepted that they have some knowledge about guidance and counselling services in schools while 62 percent disagreed that they have very little knowledge and poor attitudes toward the services. This only rings a bell

that the majority of students have negative and very little interest towards guidance and counselling services in schools. Some even confessed that guidance and counselling is not relevant in schools at all. This only means that the 1995 education act that emphasis the relevance of guidance and counselling for the holistic development of the child has not met its goals .This could also mean that professional guidance counsellors are failing in their duties.

Muango and Joel 2012 revealed that students who show approval of career counselling services in schools were influenced by the fact that they knew what career path to pursue and they found it unnecessary to seek the service. The department and programmes offered by guidance and counselling must be able to aid students to overcome career decision making and other academic challenges and difficulties. Students assume and feel that there are no provisions /services that assist them on their career decision making.

Teacher counsellors who act as guidance counsellors lack time, the ability and resources required to offer the services to students. According to students, the other major reason is that guidance counsellors are overloaded with teaching and other administrative duties. About 70 percent of the students agreed that there was no form of services was offered to assist them in their career decision making. It was proven that school heads are the ones who appoint guidance counsellors and this appointed counsellor may not be trained and does not counsel even a single student for a months or even a whole year.

The availability of resources is also a big problem as the one at the disposal of the guidance counsellors are insufficient and inadequate to carry out the services or meet the needs of students .Nyamwange, Nyakan and Ondima[2012] in their findings agreed that guidance and counselling offices and career guidance resources are insufficient. Most of the offices lack reading materials such as books, journals and other materials to aid the teacher counsellors and others do not have the resources at all which affects the student's career decision making.

THE ROLES OF GUIDANCE COUNSELLORS IN SCHOOLS

The role of a career guidance counsellor is to help students make important decisions about their future. Career / vocational decision making should be an interactive process in which the guidance counsellor and the client exchange ideas and information regarding the client's interests and experiences. Career decision making is a lifelong process that leads one to choose a job, get the job, grow in the job, change job and finally retire from the job. Individuals/ students have to continually make decisions regarding future career.

Most of the teachers agreed that one of the major roles of the guidance counsellor is personal and social growth and development of students in schools .It is believed that most students have access to this service and is worth for human dignity and academic growth of the students. According to Idowu [2004] guidance and counselling services enable students to attain maximum satisfaction, help to realise their potential and to be aware of themselves.

Guidance counsellors must help students by conducting individual and group counseling sessions to advise and assist them with academic and career development. To evaluate the students attributes and assess them to realize their objectives in life. In evaluating them, the counsellor helps them understand who they are as individuals; know their identity, values, interests, skills and personal qualities/attributes. Career assessment can be done to provide better understanding of personal skills and capabilities. The students must be left to explore different occupations of their interest. It is certain that when the individual relevant information on the job to be selected, he/she will go for the opportunities or the job itself.

Help the students to develop and implement counselling strategies, be a professional consultant and look at the student's educational level, interests and suggest a possible career path and set career goals for others who to come after. Career counselling is a process that assists students to understand and know themselves and the world of work.

After the option is clear to the students, they may be able to identify the right job and evaluates all the opportunities within and around that job. The students may explore all alternatives and then choose the correct option. Assist students to explore and investigate

the courses for additional training and help to develop job search skills and strategies to prepare them for job interviews and dress codes.

Guidance counsellors must play key role in curriculum development and issues that support student's achievements, strengths and interests. In summary, here are some of the guidelines to follow by the counsellor....Have background information/ collect information on the client.

Clarify the client's decision and identify key issues.

Write out the most important priorities/form a case out of what is most impotent.

Develop general solutions or options and rank the option.

List key uncertainties and investigate

Make your final assessment

Consider scoring your options

Make you best guess/ goal setting for the therapeutic process

Implement the intervention

Evaluate the intervention

Over and above all guidance counsellors are to be educators, consultants, teacher and liaison, must have soft skills as being able to work well with others....leadership, work ethics manner and social interaction which are very vital.

SOME CHALLENGES FACED IN CARRYING OUT GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING SERVICES IN SCHOOLS

It is important to note that students of today are faced with many problems and how they are able to endure those problems will depend on the success they must have achieved in planning for tomorrow. Planning for students was the responsibility of parent, class teachers and counsellors. Idowu [2004] states that the rapid changes going on in

adolescent's private world as well as in the world of work around them and calls for careful planning and guiding so that the chance of making a mistake will be reduced.

It is also true that there is lack of knowledge/understanding about work options and career alternatives. Every now and then, new jobs are being added as a result of technology and new innovations.

Majority of the teacher counsellors in secondary schools are appointed/ chosen by the school heads or authorities. Therefore these counsellors are under thorough supervision to carry out the instruction given by these heads and they are assigned to teach other courses or subjects. These teacher counsellors have just been trained through seminars/ workshops and some have just done guidance and counselling related courses in colleges and universities but not trained as professional guidance counsellors.

The administrator's inability to employ qualified and trained guidance counsellors has created serious problems and has caused the lack of continuous professional and formal training for guidance counsellors as specialised in the discipline of guidance and counselling. There is lack of staff development as there is no facility for sponsorship and support from authorities which has led to inadequate personnel, not professional guidance counsellors.

Another challenge is lack of funds/ resources. Resources are very important in the provision of effective and efficient guidance and counselling services in schools. It is agreed that principals do not release money for counselling services in schools, lack proper office space, materials and motivation for guidance counsellors.

Teacher counsellors are seen or looked at as a threat to the school by some parents [Bernard, 2002]. Religious beliefs and attitudes—parents see guidance counsellors as an intrusion in the private life of their children/ students [Yadeta, Bedane and Tura 2014].

Teacher counsellors are overloaded with other administrative duties and teaching of other subjects.

SUMMARY

Career planning/ decision making process happens once in one's lifetime, though it is likely to happen several times as one continues to redefine himself and his goals. Career planning / decision making requires some specific steps that will help the individual to identify his skills, interests ,capabilities and attributes. It must help one to find out his skills that he can use in the labour/ job market. This has to be done by exploring series of career fields that are of interest to the person and then gains some experience in that field. Career counsellors are said to provide career counselling outside the school settings and their main focus is on individuals with career decision making problems. Guidance and counselling services are very useful and helpful as it helps and enables one to make a clearer understanding of his concerns, skills, abilities and challenges in education. It helps one to think of creative ways of solving academic and personal problems. One to one counselling is a part of career intervention. Bright and Pryor [200], Oliver and Spokane [1988], Whiston [2000] argued that one to one career counselling is the most effective career intervention that produces the greatest gains for students in the shortest possible time. One to one career counselling is considered an advanced communication skill. To carry out this well career counsellors must acquire/ have special skills and competencies developed through university training and qualification. [DEEWR] 2008.

CONCLUSION

Career decision making in secondary schools must be given due consideration and looked at as the most appropriate method for addressing the needs of students. This is very relevant for their self development and self actualization. Career /vocational counsellors must develop skills/strategies to provide guidance and counselling services to students with their career decision making to prepare them for post secondary school and the world of work. Career guidance counsellors have to make a point of duty to provide enough and relevant information to students in secondary schools. Trained guidance counsellors must see their roles as very important in providing guidance and counselling services to students in secondary schools. Guidance counsellors also have other duties such as teaching other subjects as instructed by the administration. Career decision making is a process where an individual has the option to choose between two or more

alternatives. It is also said that when an individual has to explore some career directions and not to abandon choices previously made by him. Career decision making is referred to as client centered which involves the client to explore his preferences, assessment of his knowledge, respect how he feels and wishes to make decisions about his option in life. School plays a pivotal role in career development of students. Teacher counsellors influence their attitudes, career choice and their values. They work collaboratively with parents, members of the community and employers to prepare them for the different /various roles they will go through in life.

RECOMMENDATION

Daily life decision making starts slowly with confidence and control therefore guidance counsellors must help to promote independent thinking in students which requires some patience.

Guidance counsellors should get students into community activities that will help to decide on careers depending on their skills and experiences from the community.

Must encourage interactions with other works of life, listen to them and clarify their career decisions and desires.

Always display your professionalism and expertise to students but do not sell your services for money or whatsoever.

Try to build trust in them by motivating and reward them for their good actions and contributions.

There must be a mutual / cordial working relationship between and good communication with the students.

All practicing counselors from all levels of learning institutions must design individual and group counseling programs for students that will help them to cater for comprehensive and effective career decision making at all levels.

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