

# Counselling the Youth for National Stability and Integration

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The paper conceptually examines the applicability of counselling as a mechanism through which the potentials of youths can be explored and use for building stable and integrated Nigeria. Youth remains the engine for national development and their ability to use own potentials, skills and values depend largely on healthy mental state, ability to make right decision and healthy behaviour. The paper conceptually highlights the role of counselling in structuring and restructuring the mind-set, behaviour development and adjustment, exploration of potentials and rational decision making among the youth. The paper focuses on secondary sources and it is discovered that good behaviour development and maturity, interpersonal relationship and healthy living among others are the outcome of counselling the youth which are the fundamental requirements for national stability and integration.

**Keywords:** Counselling; Stability; Integration; Youth; Nigeria

## INTRODUCTION

Counselling is one of the essential services require in school and beyond. It is a helping profession and it is the human characteristics that provide the basis for the profession to contribute its special knowledge and skills. American School Counsellor Association (ASCA 1997) defines school counselling as a process of helping people by assisting them in making decisions and changing behaviour. Today, the major focus of counselling is acquisition and incorporation into one's self system of life adjustment strategies that foster productive rather than self-defeating behaviour (Paisley and Borders 1995).

Counselling remains subject across all levels of education and the fundamental objective of counselling at high school level is to assist students' transition into adult. Therefore development and implementation of a comprehensive developmental counselling programme that is life skill-based to assist students in developing interpersonal relationship skills, problem solving and decision making skills, an appreciation of each person's uniqueness and acceptance and tolerance of individual differences should remain the focus of counsellors (Rosemary, 2002).

Counsellors are human behaviour and relationship specialist who organize their work around fundamental interventions (Abubakar, 2009). Counselling has been applied in various settings aimed at achieving different goals including stability, conflict and transformation. Therefore, the objective of the paper is to demonstrate the relevance of counselling as mechanism through which stability and integration can be achieved in Nigeria being a diverse country.

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## **YOUTH IN NIGERIA**

Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa with an estimated population of 166 million people (World Bank, 2014). Out of the total population, about 30% are youth (adolescents) (National Bureau of Statistics, 2010) indicating that the country has substantial number of people at productive age that could be utilised for national development.

This aged category is interchangeably termed as youth, teenager, young person or adolescent. Youth expresses a particular mind-set, character or appearance. A young person is identified with certain characteristics as vigour, freshness, adventurous etc. Youth is a stage of constructing the self-concept and inferred that the self-concept of youth is influenced by several variables such as peers, lifestyle, gender and culture. Youth is the early stage or period of human existence, growth and development (Prester, 2003).

Kennedy (1966) in his address to National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) in the University of Cape Town South Africa during the 'Day of Affirmation' overtly advocated that, "This world demands the qualities of youth; not a time of life but a state of mind, a temper of the will, a quality of imagination, a predominance of courage over timidity, of the appetite for adventure over the life of ease".

Nigeria being a heterogeneous society in terms of ethnic, religious and cultural pluralism with teeming youth is prone to conflict (instability) (Agagu, 2004) and confronted with varied crises and violence due to its diverse and energetic young people (Odunniyi, 2004). The situation affects stability and integration of the country being the core in the foundation of Nigeria unity and corporate existence.

## **COUNSELLING AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT**

One of the integral components of counselling is personal and social development of individual. Academic attainment and choice of successful career are incomplete unless students understand and accept themselves personally and use this understanding to successfully relate with others (Schmidt 2008).

The key issue to be considered in social and personal development is to design activities that could help students learn social skills and identify personal attributes that will enable them to lead more satisfying lives. The method of imparting these skills has shifted from traditional approach which emphasized on individual to comprehensive programme that bestowed responsibility on the counsellor to meet the needs of all students, not just those with problems. The effective and efficient delivery system is to work with group of students either in instructional capacity or in small group of counselling settings (Schmidt 2008).

## **YOUTH, STABILITY AND INTEGRATION**

In heterogeneous society like Nigeria, the diverse ethnic groups differ in terms of languages, moral values, cultures, religious beliefs, attitude towards life and death (Kunene, n.d.). Such type of society requires an educative approach for its stability and integration. Stability denotes a condition of being steady in position or balance (Onyemekara, 2013). Stability and integration can be achieved when the diversity is properly approached by applying appropriate counselling techniques.

Social stability can be achieved when human resource development is prioritised and utilised as Ugoji in Njimezi and Egonu (n.d.) contended:

... of all the contributory factors to economic development, human resources stand out as a major force because people are the real wealth of any nation and because the basic objective of economic development is to create an enabling environment for people to enjoy long health and creative lives (101-102).

## **REQUIREMENTS FOR NATIONAL STABILITY AND INTEGRATION**

### **Stable Mental Health**

Mental health refers to optimal functioning or wellbeing in psychological and social domains. According to Kazdin (1993, p128) wellbeing is not merely the absence of impairment but it rather refers to the presence of personal and interpersonal strengths that promote optimal functioning . . . In the case of adolescents, social competence reflects the ability to negotiate developmentally relevant social tasks and to utilize personal and interpersonal resources to achieve positive outcomes.

Counsellors help in managing variety of individuals' concerns such as stress, anxiety, depression, mood swings, cultural adjustment, difficulties with focus and concentration etc that affect mental health. Counsellors are capable of helping individuals to over these psychosocial problems that may affect individual actions and reactions. Therefore, stability and integration depend largely on healthy mental state of the productive use in the country.

### **Behaviour Modification**

The diverse nature of Nigeria in terms of the tribal and religious dimensions suggest that behaviour of Nigerian demands modification for better understanding of the diversity, foster interaction and national stability. This is achievable when counselling approaches are judiciously utilised in modifying behaviour. The goal of behaviour modification is to change behaviour and the techniques being employed are relevant to both children and adults. Behaviour modification usually seeks to stop an unwanted behaviour and replace it with a desired behaviour (<http://www.tccwv.org/>). Therapists assist clients and parents through the use of the principles of reinforcement, by reinforcing desired behaviours while constructing ways to extinguish unwanted behaviours.

### **Youth Engagement**

The teeming youth population has enormous role to play in the national stability and integration. Stability of Nigeria depends largely on the youth especially when they are connected with appropriate educational and career opportunities relevant to the respective personalities. This is to say that youth must be educated, trained and then connected to the careers that are congruent to their respective personality. These activities will in no doubt engage the youth to remain productive and useful to themselves, respective communities, and society at large.

## **Empowerment**

Empowerment is seen as a process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes (World Bank, 2011). Empowerment is an expansion of assets and capabilities of poor people (Onyemekara, 2013). Youth being economically dependent requires empowerment in form of skill acquisition and absence of incentive makes them prone to destructive behaviour.

Empowerment remains fundamental in attaining stability and integration, therefore, a well and carefully design empowerment programme based on the interest, aptitude and skills of the beneficiaries need to be developed. Young people belong to the generation of potentially productive force and they represent important opportunity for locally led economic growth, which can secure a prosperous future (RISE Networks, 2013).

## **Personality Match**

Counselling offers approaches that guide connection of personality and appropriate job environment. This connection enables individuals to be productive and useful to self and society at large. Counselling provides various approaches to career choice. One of such approaches is Trait and Factor developed by Frank Parson (1908) who conceptualized a three step process that help individual to make career choices that comprises of (a) clear understanding of self, aptitude, abilities, interest, ambition, resources, limitation and their causes (b) knowledge of requirement, condition of success, advantages and disadvantages, compensation, opportunities and prospects in different levels of workers (c) true reasoning on the relations of these two groups of facts.

## **Youth, National Stability and Integration**

Youths are the engine for social and economic development and the teeming youth population in Nigeria could be judiciously utilised to reposition the country through counselling being effective mechanism for social and behavioural adjustment. The youth has enormous role to play in the national stability and integration especially when they are engaged in productive activities and adequately informed about the diversity and its importance. Youth can be made productive and appreciate diversity when they are properly educated and connected to the appropriate educational and career opportunities relevant to the respective personalities across the country.

Counselling is very much relevant in that direction as it promotes optimum utilization of the human resources thereby exploring their potential for self and national development. Nigeria with its diverse population can be more integrated to reflect the true federalism by employing Person centred approach being one of the commonly used counselling approaches in promoting harmony among diverse and disputed communities. The country has a tendency to explore the diversity for its development and this ability seems to be blocked by regional affiliation.

The approach sees human beings as having innate tendency to develop towards full potentials. The therapist works to understand individual's experience from their point of view. It is a profound doctrine which offers the necessary and sufficient conditions for the successful relationships. It is widely believed to be relevant in helping individual and diverse political ideology. It is a self-directed growth process and follows the provision and reception of a particular kind of relationship characterised by genuineness, non-judgemental caring and empathy.

In the therapy, positive value in all aspects of humanity are considered and this is vital in helping individual and community to feel accepted and better understand their own feelings especially helping them reconnect with inner values and sense of self-worth. The reconnection with inner resources enables way forward. The therapy has been applied to various circumstances including disputes.

## **CONCLUSION**

Nigeria, with diverse ethnic, religious and political groups needs counselling services and approaches in order to foster stability and integration for the collective benefit, progress and development of the country. Employing counselling services will help the country to reposition itself by bringing the diverse communities so that the country can benefit substantially from the diversity. Therefore, the paper demonstrates that counselling is strong tool that Nigeria requires in order to benefit from the teeming youth available. Thus, country's political leaders at all levels have a spearheading role to play by exploring counselling being a profession that is geared towards to overall human development. Exploring counselling mechanism enhance capacity for optimum human resource utilisation thereby attaining stability that may subsequently lead to integration.

Counselling programme can play a vital in the area of integration in which the diverse communities of Nigeria can be made to understand the diversity better so that the youth can contribute their quota towards development of respective communities and the country at large. This can be achieved by making the various political zones to become interdependent through varying specialization.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is clear that counselling has significant role to play in the national stability and integration. Therefore, the following recommendations need to be implemented

1. Inadequate self-awareness and underutilisation of youth constitute some of the causative factors of instability. Therefore, improving the level of self-awareness among youth and connecting them with appropriate educational and occupation opportunities should be a priority.
2. Counselling profession should further be institutionalised and promoted at all level of education. Doing this, will enable counsellors to design programmes that may help in harnessing the resources of the youth and curtail negative behaviours that prevent their development.
3. Counselling approaches should be harnessed and put into use in informal setting so that ethnic and religious harmony among the diverse societies could be enhanced thereby making the country more stable and integrated.
4. Counselling association e.g. CASSON should engage in programmes via media e.g. radio so that members of the public may get know themselves, potentials, skills and values and how they relate to individual and societal development.
5. Studies should be carried out periodically to assess the effect(s) of counselling approaches with a view to improving them.

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