

Counselling Services, Psychological Testing and Assessment for Quality Higher Education in Nigeria

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Abstract:

Education is a critical factor in producing human resource that is necessary for economic development of a country. In Nigeria, one of the major goals of Higher education as stated in the National Policy on Education is to provide high quality career counselling and life – long learning programmes that prepare students with the knowledge and skills for self reliance. Furthermore, Nigeria's philosophy of education is based on the integration of the individual into a sound and effective citizen at all levels of education. To achieve this, the role of counselling cannot be overemphasised, likewise the use of psychological testing. However, this aspect is often neglected in the counselling process, thereby conducting counselling out of intuition and of natural experience and subjectivity. Therefore, this paper brings to bare the contemporary counselling services in higher education and the importance of psychological testing and assessment. In addition, it discusses the nexus between counselling and psychological testing with various hindrances to effective use of psychological tests in higher institutions. Conclusively, the paper proffers suggestions on how psychological testing could be enhanced in the counselling process for quality higher education in Nigeria.

Keywords: Counselling, Psychological Testing, Assessment

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I. INTRODUCTION

Education has been defined as the process of deliberately and systematically transmitting desirable and meaningful knowledge, values, attitudes and skills to an individual. Education has been seen to be a vehicle for the development of a sustainable economy, acquisition of appropriate skills and development of mental, physical, social abilities, and competencies (Alutu, 2019). The goals of education is often reflected in the educational policies and philosophy of a nation. In Nigeria, education is seen as an instrument for affecting the individuals needs and national development in consonance with the realities of Nigerian environment and the world as a global village (Akpama, Bassey, & Idiaka 2012). According to Usoro (2012), the major role of education is to produce the various classes of manpower needed by the economy. Hence the Nigerian government relies on education as a springboard for its development and reform programme. The Nigeria's philosophy of education is based on the integration of the individual into a sound and effective citizen and equal educational opportunities for all citizens of the nation (FRN, 2014). Therefore, the educational system in Nigeria has been classified into three levels namely the Basic, Post – basic, and higher school levels.

The higher education level, which is the main focus of this paper, refers to tertiary institutions which offer post – basic (secondary) education after graduating from secondary schools. Tertiary Institution includes Universities, Colleges of education, Polytechnics and Monotechnics (Fakomogbon & Adegbiya, 2011). According to FRN (2004) the goals of education at this level include to contribute to: National development through high level relevant manpower training,

acquire both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to be self – reliant and useful members of the society; and promote scholarship and community service. These goals are to be pursued through teaching, research and social/community service (Lawal, 2009). However in order to achieve quality delivery at this level, Nigerian government established regulatory authorities. These include the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) and the National Universities Commission (NUC). The NUC was established in 1962 as an advisory and regulatory agency to the government on University education matters. The commission recognizes the importance of counseling in the attainment of its mandate, Hence it made it compulsory for all Universities under its Students Support Services to establish a counselling and Human Development Centres (NUC 2013). These centres are to provide contemporary counselling services in their various academic communities for the development of individuals and promotion of teaching and learning.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In recognition of the importance of counseling in the Nation's Higher Institutions, the NUC directed that every Nigerian University should have a well - equipped counselling centre. This directive was to ensure that Nigerian Universities provide psychological, behavioural and other learning support services to students (NUC 2013). This credible intention has been applauded by scholars and educationists such as Aluede (2014), Alutu (2016) and Ibijola (2017)

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who observed that these higher education students are in need of academic socio – personal and vocational counselling in order to cope with varying challenges that the unfolding life presents. Unfortunately many of these centres have not been able to effectively carryout their mandate and offering desired psychological support to the clients. Lack of personnel and inadequate diagnostic tools are some of the noticeable problems confronting the centres. Therefore, this paper aimed at addressing the importance of psychological testing and assessment in counselling delivery for quality higher education in Nigeria. The scope will cover the existing counselling services in higher institutions, the concept and evolution of psychological testing and assessment, psychological testing and assessment in counselling practice, uses of psychological testing and assessment and hindrances to effective psychological testing and assessment with a view to making recommendations.

III. COUNSELLING SERVICES IN HIGHER INSTITUTIONS

Counseling has been variously defined by scholars and workers in the fields of counselling, psychology and sociology. For instance, Bakare (1996) defined Counselling to be a number of procedures used in assisting individuals in solving problems which arise in various aspects of their lives. According to Bakare (1996), counseling also assists individuals to maximize their overall personal development so that they could be more effective, satisfied and more useful to the society in which they live. The American Psychological Association (APA, 2000) refers to counselling psychology as one of the fifty-three (53) branches of psychology and coded as Division 17. In the same vein, Akinboye (2003) said counselling Psychology of the 21st century could be seen as a speciality in the field of psychology where its practitioners (counselling) help counsellees improve their well-being, alleviate distress, resolve crises, and increase their ability to be creative, innovative and make success – focused decisions wherever they exist (Akinade, 2006). Alutu (2019) enumerated the counseling needs of Higher education students as:

Academic Counselling Needs

- How to read, understand, and pass examination
- Combining full – time studies with business
- Time management
- Examination preparation

Social Counselling Needs

- Course – mate friendship
- Mode of dressing
- Ways of worshipping God
- How to love and understand fellow human beings
- How to adjust to different changes in society
- Management of financial resources

Personal Counselling Needs

- Marriage (choosing a partner)
- To know God more

- Selection of friends to move with
- How to face life challenges
- Success in marriage

Vocational Counselling Needs

- Change of career
- Job placement

Although the modalities for the establishment and operations of these counselling centres are as enshrined in the NUC Benchmark Statements (NUC, 2013), however Institutions are expected to provide services in line with the requirements of its students and the University communities. Yahaya (2017) enumerated the following available counselling services in Nigerian higher institutions.

- a. **Educational Counselling:** This involves provision of assistance to students in order to reflect on educational issues and experiences and to make appropriate decisions. It focuses on issues relating to academic success and realization of educational goals. This includes issues such as admission, study skills, coping with examination anxiety, choice of course, preparation for graduation and life after graduation.
- b. **Personal – Social Counselling:** It deals with intra and interpersonal concerns. It focuses on personal, social and psychological concerns of students which, if not well managed, can hinder full development.
- c. **Career/Vocational Counselling:** This involves provision of guidance and direction to students on career related issues. Major highlight of this service include guiding students on choice of career, career prospects and strategies of securing employment.
- d. **Financial Counselling:** This is a counseling service through which financial guide is provided on management of income, assets, accountability and assess to loans, scholarships and awards.
- e. **Health Counselling:** This involves provision of assistance to clients who have concerns about their health. It focuses on promotion of good physical and mental conditions and freedom from diseases. Counsellors also encourage clients to live a healthy life.
- f. **Marriage Counselling:** This involves preparation of students for conjugal relationships and promotion of marital satisfaction. It involves promotion of assistance on mate selection, handling of marital challenges and sustenance of family life values.
- g. **Religious Counselling:** Spirituality and religion have therapeutic value in counselling. Through religious counseling, counselors are able to assist students and other members of the University community on religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence. Through this, religious conflicts and extreme religious practices could be adequately curtailed.

Furthermore, Akinade (2006) listed some of the traditional service counsellors conduct in institutions to include orientation, appraisal, placement, evaluation, curriculum development, referral, follow up and research among others.

IV. CONCEPT AND EVOLUTION OF PSYCHOLOGICAL TESTING AND ASSESSMENT IN NIGERIA

The term 'test' is a broad concept that encompasses various activities related to its area of uses. Different definitions have been given to the meaning of Test as a concept. Anastasi (1982) described a test as an objective and standardized measure of a sample of human behaviour. Likewise, Abiri (2006) defined a test as a test task, treatment or situation designed to elicit the behaviour or performance of a person or thing with the view of determining or drawing inferences about specific abilities or other attributes of those persons or things. Dwelling on this background, the pertinent question at this point is what differentiates a test from a psychological test?

Psychological Tests are expected to deal with human behaviour because psychology is conceptualized as the study of human behaviour. Since behaviour connotes what the actions of the individual or what he or she can do in a given situation, Ipaye (1983) explained psychological test to mean a structured exercise or situation by means of which a person's behaviour, way of thinking is assessed with a view of making a generalized conclusion. One of the working definitions of psychological test was given by Bakare (1983) as a stimulus presented to an individual so as to elicit a response and on the basis of that response, a judgment is made as to the attributes of such possessed by that individual. Further to this background, Kolo (1989) sees psychological testing as a process through which psychological tests are labeled as the instrument or stimulus is administered on the individual and the responses scored, interpreted and communicated to that individual.

In Nigeria, unlike in Europe, it was the need to select people to educational institutions that led to the development of psychological tests. The very first attempt was made in the early 50s when a number of foreign tests were adapted for selecting children into primary schools. These were verbal and non-verbal tests such as ML, MQ, Q. Later on, tests were used for personnel selection and Vocational counselling services by the Federal Ministry of Education. Thereafter, was the formation of the TEDRO of the West African Examination Council (WAEC) which specialized in Aptitude Testing and developed a number of tests known as the I.D test Tests. A major landmark was made by Prof CGM Bakare who developed a number of psychological tests for counselling. These include Student Problem Inventory (SPI), Study Habit Inventory (SHI), Motivation for Occupational Preference Scale (MOPS), Vocational Interest Inventory (VII) which were developed and validated throughout the country. Today, we have quite a number of psychological tests developed by individuals, psychologists, counsellors, Universities and Counselling centres in both public and private sectors.

The various higher institutions (public and private) are expected to establish functional counselling centres. These centres are expected to provide counselling programmes in the academic, career, personal as well as social domains. Their services and programmes help students resolve emotional, social or behaviour problems and help them

develop a clear focus or sense of direction. In addition, effective counselling programmes offered by these centres are important to the institutional climates and are crucial elements in improving students' achievements.

V. PSYCHOLOGICAL TESTING AND ASSESSMENT IN COUNSELLING PRACTICE

There is a nexus between counselling practice and psychological testing and assessment. Higher Institutions are faced with myriads of problems and concerns for both students and non-students. Therefore effective counseling programme is highly dependent on effective psychological testing programme, otherwise counseling would be conducted out of intuition and of natural experience and subjectivity. Naglieri, Drasgow, Margolis et al (2004) cautioned that counselling activities at this level should be more of assessment than testing. The opined that there should be a clear distinction between testing and psychological assessment as many use the two terms synonymously. To the scholars, testing refers to the administration, scoring, and perhaps the interpretation of individual test scores by applying a descriptive meaning based on normative, nomothetic data. In addition, while the focus on testing is on the individual test itself, in psychological assessment, the emphasis is typically on the person being assessed and the referral question, rather than on specific test results (Naglier, Drasgow, Schmit et al 2004). Testing itself is part of psychological assessment process which often involves much more complexity and requires a high degree of skill, psychological sophistication and education (Naglier, Drasgow, Schmit et al, 2004). Therefore, this distinction is a clear emphasis that what a counsellor does in this aspect is more of psychological assessment.

It is very important to note that psychological testing and assessment play a pivotal role in the counselling services. Wall (2004) expressed the view that basing judgments, decisions and interventions specifically on information acquired in some systematic and objective way is of major importance in the life of a practicing counsellor. Whiston (2000) suggested that integrating appropriate skilled and refined assessment skills into counselling is necessary to deepen the effectiveness of counselling as inability to use tests and assessments when and where appropriate may limit counsellor's effectiveness in serving their clients. Therefore, Popoola and Oluwatosin (2018) opined that as a matter of necessity, practicing counsellors have to engage in assessment on a daily basis, whether through the use of published instruments, conducting intake interviews, or listening to clients description of life experiences. Whiston (2008) cautioned that counsellors should not view assessment as a distinct activity in the counselling process in which they simply administer tests, rather assessment activities should be integrated into the four stages of the counselling process. These include assessing the client's problem; Conceptualizing and defining the client problems; Selecting and implementing effective treatment(s); Evaluating the counselling.

VI. USES OF PSYCHOLOGICAL TESTING AND ASSESSMENT

Testing is indeed an importance of counseling and education. In today's educational system and practice. Adebule, Omijigin and Akomolafe (2016) noted that psychological testing is very much a product of modern society with its unprecedented technology and population growth and unique problems. They observed that psychological tests have played an important role in Nigeria education system in helping to solve some of its major challenges. Basically, uses of psychological testing and assessment include the following:

a. Selection

Test can be used for selection into educational institutions, military jobs especial during recruitment exercise or in selecting personnel into various arms of services and in selection into tasks or jobs. When testing is conducted for selection, the major purpose is to use the scores as part of the criteria or the only criteria to selecting candidates into such. When tests are administered for selection in educational institutions, the objective is to use the test scores in determining the types of school or course (s) suitable for the individual.

b. Placement

Psychological testing can be conducted for placement when individual employers or institution use tests to place individual into a particular position within their organization. Tests can also be used to discover the personality characteristics of an individual and match such with the demands of his/her vocational areas.

c. Prediction

Testing programme can be organized for predictive purposes. This refers to ability to predict future performance of an individual or groups of individual. According to Okoye and Agwagah (1996), tests can be used to predict an individual's success in a particular area.

d. Classification

Classification involves forming groups. It is putting together people that have homogenous group and it is not the same as placement. Classification usually takes place before training while placement comes up after training. Psychological test can be administered to achieve this purpose of classifying individuals, abilities, skills into various groups and categories. In the learning environment, tests are used in grouping students for more effective teaching. For instance groups that may need remedial programme can be determined through testing. It is also possible to identify under-achievers, fast learners, poor readers and emotionally disturbed learners through psychological testing.

VII. EVALUATION

Psychological tests can be administered to evaluate programmes, institutions and students. It is a process of comparing actual attainment with desired attainment.

American Psychological Association (2010) viewed psychological evaluation as a way of testing people about their behaviour and capabilities to draw conclusion using combinations of techniques. Evaluation draws on one's judgment to determine the overall value of an outcome based on the assessment data (Adebule, Omjigin & Akomolafe, 2016). In counselling, evaluation can be used in educational settings for multiple purposes such as diagnostics, formations and summative among others.

VIII. DIAGNOSIS

In counselling situation, tests can be used for diagnostic purpose. This involves administering tests for the purposes of identifying individuals behavioural problems as well as their causes. In teaching and learning environment, the diagnostic functions of psychological tests involve identifying problems, causative factors and remediation of problems. Tests can also be use to diagnose areas of educational, vocational and personal-social concerns. Scoyoc (2004) noted that the primary use of tests continues to be as an aid to decision making.

IX. HINDRANCES TO EFFECTIVE PSYCHOLOGICAL TESTING AND ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER INSTITUTIONS

Various scholars have identified the crucial roles of psychological testing and assessment in delivery of quality education, character training and national development. However the total delivery of this inseparable aspect of counseling is no doubt bedeviled with identifiable problems and challenges. Adegoroye, Ayodele and Babatunde (2007) in Popoola and Oluwatosin (2018) expressed that the counselling units in Nigerian Institutions have not been able to properly assess and test students' character. Problems associated with psychological testing and assessment in institutions includes the following.

- a. **Inadequate number of qualified counselors.** One of the problems of counseling practice in Nigeria is dearth of professional counselors. Contrary to the global standard of one counsellor to two hundred and fifty students (American Counselling Association, 2005), most of the counseling centres in higher institutions lack the required minimum number of counselors. Yahaya (2017) presented the population of students and Counsellors in selected Universities in Nigeria as follow;

Students Population and Number of Counsellors in selected Federal Universities in the Six Geo-Political Zones of Nigeria

Zone	State	School	Population of Students	Number of Counsellors
North-West	Kaduna	Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria	45,658	9
North-East	Borno	University of Maiduguri, Maiduguri	33,691	1
North-Central	Kwara	University of Ilorin, Ilorin	45,579	11
South-East	Enugu	University of Nigeria, Nsukka	36,423	7
South-West	Lagos	University of Lagos	45,856	4
South-South	Rivers	University of Port-Harcourt	30,699	13

Source: Yahaya (2017)

- b. Dearth of psychological Testing instruments.** In Nigeria, psychological testing and assessment is still evolving. Hence there are few existing testing instruments. While the few existing ones are not being used effectively.
- c. Lack of coordination of psychological Testing Assessment Process.** Effective coordination and censorship of existing psychological tests and use in Nigeria is yet to be established. Although the country has been able to produce a National Policy on Counselling (FME, 2018) but its implementation is yet to commence. There is no Inventory of existing psychological tests. In addition, no acceptable guidelines for development, coordination and operational use of testing and assessment. Therefore, issues such as professional competence, protection of privacy and confidentiality are yet to be addressed.
- d. Other hindrances:** According to Yahaya (2017) these include; inconsistent government policies, inadequate funding; inadequate facilities, cultural barriers, ignorance, negative attitude of school administrators' negative attitude of counselling practitioners; and lack of a professional board.

X. CONCLUSION

Conclusively, psychological testing and assessment remain a major requirement in professional counselling practice. The concerns of the individual client and the nature of counselling dictate the type(s) of psychological test(s) to be used. Effective integration of testing and assessment process can be of great assistance in fostering positive values, good character, attitude and skills among youths and scholars in various higher institutions for national growth and development. However, it is important that the principles of good testing and ethical standards for practitioners are fundamental and must be upheld.

XI. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study, the following recommendations are made:

- Evaluation of Counselling programmes and services in all higher institutions in the country.
- Establishment of Counselling Professional Board at Federal and state levels.
- Incorporation of psychological testing and assessment in all higher institutions in Nigeria.
- Coordination and regulation of psychological tests and instruments in both public and private practices in the country by government and professional counseling bodies.

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