APPROACHES TO RESOLVING CLIENT PROBLEMS IN COUNSELLING IN A MULTIETHNIC SOCIETY AS PECEIVED BY GUIDANCE COUNSELLORS IN ANAMBRA STATE

BY

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Abstract

This paper investigated approaches to resolving clients' problem in counselling, in a multi ethnic society as perceived by guidance counsellors in Anambra State, Nigeria. The study is a descriptive survey guided by two research questions. The population of the study includes all the 145 Guidance Counsellors in public secondary schools in Anambra State. The whole 145 counsellors equally formed the sample of the study. Questionnaires; "Counsellors' Perception of Problems of Counselling in a Multi-Ethnic Society'' (CPPCMESQ) and "Counsellors' Perception of Approaches to counselling in a Multi-ethnic society" (CPACMESQ) were used to collect data from the respondents using direct delivery approach. Then, the data were collated, scored and analysed using mean and percentage. Findings from the study revealed among others that a higher percentage of the counsellors chose Eclectic, behaviour modification, and integrative approaches to counselling as the suited approaches to counselling in a multi-ethnic society Nigeria. Findings further revealed that problems of counselling in a multi-ethnic society includes; language barrier, tribalism, religion, high level of illiteracy, ethnic prejudice, application of appropriate theory, beliefs, practices and values of the clients, and not recognizing that ethnicity and culture are significant parameters for understanding psychological processes are problems to counselling. Based on the findings, the implication of the study was formed and recommendations made.

INTRODUCTION

Counselling in a multi ethnic population comes with a great challenge. This type of counselling is that in which the counsellor and the client may differ as a result of language and socialization in a unique cultural or ethnic environments. Counselling according to Gladding (1992) is a relatively short-term, interpersonal, theory-based, professional activity guided by ethical and legal standards that focuses on helping persons who are basically psychologically healthy to resolve developmental and situational problems. The counselling activity itself is a process that evolves through distinct stages. Personal, social, vocational and educational matters are all areas of concern, and it encompasses various subspecialties, including; school counselling, family counselling, mental health counselling, rehabilitation counselling and career counselling. Each has specific educational and experiential requirements for counsellors, especially those practicing in a multi-ethnic society like Nigeria.

Nigeria as a Nation is a multi-ethnic society consisting of about 350 ethnic groups with each group having its own norms, values, beliefs and language. The implication of this to counselling practice in Nigeria according to Aluede and Maliki (2005) is that clients in counselling come from very different ethnic groups' with different customs, values and peculiarities.

Ethnic group according to Encyclopaedia Britannica is seen as a social group or category of the population that, in a larger society, is set apart and bound together by common ties of race, language nationality, or culture. Ethnic group is further defined according to Rakov (1990), as a group of people having a common language and cultural values. Ethnic groups in Nigeria are frequently identified by distinctive patterns of family life, language, recreation, religion and other customs which cause them to be differentiated from each other. These common factors are emphasized by frequent interaction between the people in the group.

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As a country, one of the problems of building Nigeria as a nation is multi-ethnicity with its attendant challenges, such as multi-lingualism, multi-religious beliefs and what Jekayinfa (2002) referred to as competitive ethnicity. This is a situation whereby different ethnic groups compete for supremacy. As Jekayinfa noted, from 1947, the multi-ethnic composition of Nigeria has continued to be a problem to Nigeria's national unity and development. He claimed that whatever that is done or anticipated in Nigeria, principally at government's quarters, usually have ethnic undertone. For instance, in employment, admissions into schools, distribution of social amenities and in social relationships, ethnic affiliations and attachments are very strong and noticeably manifesting.

Similarly, attachment of a Nigerian first to his ethnic group before the nation constitutes blight to Nigeria's national unity, national consciousness and socio-political integration. Thus, it is as result of his clear understanding of Nigeria that Obafemi Awolowoin 1947bluntly stated that Nigeria was "a mere-geographical expression" (Jekayinfa, 2002). This could simply be interpreted to mean that in terms of societal relations and national identification, Nigeria was not yet a nation. It is however sad to acknowledge at this point, that just like Awolowo was acknowledged to be right then, his words could still said to have remained true to date, as Nigeria in the opinion of this researcher has remained nothing close to a united country, but simply a mere geographical expression. This today could also be said to be an incontestable fact which requires the collaborative effort of every well-meaning person in the country to work towards correcting the anomaly for a positive and lasting change to come.

Nigeria is so varied that there is no clear definition of a Nigerian beyond that of someone who lives within the borders of the country; what is really pronounced are varying ethnic groups of different languages and culture (Jekayinfa, 2002). The recent election outbursts by well-respected and highly placed individuals in the country are a testimony to this unmitigated fact. There have been cases of multi-ethnic vices such as allegiance to ethnic-group, intra-cultural and inter-ethnic antagonism, hostility, aggression, bitterness, hatred, mistrust in the country which have not augured well for the building of a strong and united Nigerian nation. Rather than harnessing the diversities towards viable nation building, Nigerians have become slaves to their ethnic origin to which the allegiance is largely focused at the detriment of nation building.

There is no gainsaying that Nigeria is currently facing myriads of problems posing a great threat to its peaceful coexistence as a nation. One major but often neglected problem is poverty. Smith and Vasquez in Patel (2012) caution that it is important to distinguish differences that arise from ethnic and cultural backgrounds from those that are as a result of poverty or deprived status. They noted that failure to make this distinction can lead to mistaken people’s reaction to poverty and discrimination for their cultural pattern. Since many members of each ethnic group in Nigeria lives in poverty, it may no doubt fuel their suspicion and hatred towards each other as each sees the other as being responsible their lack and deprivation. According to Jekayinfa (2002), the fear of being confined to the bottom of

the interethnic ladder of inequality generates divisive and destructive socio-economic competition which has anti-social effects. Such negative effects as demonstrations, rioting and various forms of violent agitations become instruments in interethnic relations.

Another major impediment to peaceful co-existence in Nigeria according to Agbakwuru and Opara (2013) is ethnic prejudice. Ethnic prejudice is defined according to Brehim, Kassin and Fein (2005), as negative feelings towards people based on their membership in a group. It can also be seen as the holding of preformed opinions based on insufficient knowledge, irrational feelings or inaccurate stereotypes (Microsoft Encarta, 2009). Experience has shown vividly that ethnic prejudice is entrenched in Nigeria as each ethnic group has some negative stereotypes it cherishes about other ethnic groups. With Nigeria's multi-ethnic and multi-language diversity, one does not really need a soothsayer, nor have any need to stress the mind to understand the level of ethnic predisposition already entrenched in the system.

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The situation is further made worse by the high rate of illiteracy in the country. According to Agulanna, cited in Agbakwuru and Opara (2013), the problems resulting from this is that the multitudes of illiterate people do not have considerable information about other ethnic groups. They simply depend and act based on egotistical and prejudiced information they have gathered about other ethnic groups from their folks, friends and relations. This is perhaps why Agulanna asserted that prejudice is the child of ignorance.

Nigeria is a diverse nation, and due to its diverse nature, there is the need to be more cautious when dealing with any issue that concerns the interest of a part or of the whole of the country. This is to ensure an equitable representation of all the diverse cultures at play in the Nigerian nation state without compromising the interest of the whole. This is likely to guarantee an even playing ground for all and a meaningful and coordinated development of the country in general.

There has to be a conscious effort on the part of all and sundry, to accept the distinctiveness of all the ethnic and cultural entities to ensure a true and lasting unity and real integration of Nigeria people. Hence, the situation calls for a conscious effort on the part of all, especially the guidance counsellors in devising situational appropriate approaches to counselling as the country is dire need of today. Counsellors need to have understanding of this diversity to succeed in resolving any problem that may rear its ugly head. Counsellors who fail to understand the dynamics of the country does so, not only at their own peril, but more importantly, to the detriment of the country as well.

The implication of this to counselling practice in Nigeria as noted by Aluede and Maliki (2005) is that the clients today come from very diverse ethnic groups with different norms, values and idiosyncrasies. By understanding the differences among clients from a culture-centred agenda, it places the counsellor in the right position to choose appropriate counselling approach to resolving clients' problems in counselling, irrespective of their ethnic affiliations, language, and beliefs.

There are some assumptions in counselling which are believed to be centred on western cultural values, norms and beliefs. Pedersen, Draguns, Lonner, Trimble (2008), for instance, lists ten frequent assumptions of this culture that, if not dealt with, lead to bias and breakdown in client-counsellor relationships. Among these beliefs are those connected with normal behaviour; those that emphasize the health of the person over that of the family, those that promote the isolation of counselling from other professions, those that neglect natural

client support systems, those that stress linear thinking instead of system thinking, and, those that neglect history and concentrate on the present. Unfortunately, the majority of counselling theories practiced today are built around the western cultural beliefs; not many of them however, are always applicable to clients in other places whose cultures are different from the west, including developing countries like Nigeria with its multiple ethnic groups.

Axelson (1985) acknowledged that there are concerns unique to each group, and it is the counsellor that must solve the problem of how to be effective with individuals from each background. Pedersen, Draguns, Lonner, Trimble (2008) believes that it is essential for counsellors to be sensitive to cultural issues in three areas: Knowledge, awareness and skills. This sensitivity as Pendersen, et al. (2008) noted is derived from the counsellor's understanding of cultures. Understanding the cultural approach as Aluede and Maliki (2005) noted means acknowledging the importance of both cultural differences and cultural similarities, by defining culture to include all potential roles or identities a person may have based on ethnographic, demographic status or affiliations. Aluede and Maliki (2005) emphasized that culture-centred framework allows persons with culturally different behaviours to maintain their cultural differences while focusing on the common grounds of culturally similar expectations for fairness, trust or success for the counselling relationship. Thus, counselling relationships as suggested in Aluede and Maliki (2005) provide a framework for each counsellor to construct an approach to counselling that fits all clients' cultural identity. Approaches in the context of this study therefore means the ways in which professional counsellors deal with clients problems in counselling.

Several authors such as Agbakwuru and Opara (2013); Bergin and Jensen (1990); Jekayinfa (2002); Patel (2012) have contended that counsellors' personal and professional values and approach can influence a number of aspects of the counselling process. Almost all theory of psychotherapy or counselling incorporates heavily value-laden assumptions about people, the world and the process of helping. Such values consistently affect the counsellors' choice of theoretical approaches and the inherent therapeutic techniques and skills. In consequence, conflicts may occur when clients and counsellors differ in their beliefs, especially when it concerns religion. Bergin and Jensen (1990) noted that counsellors may see the inclusion of religious material in counselling as less important than their clients. However, as Jafari (1993) observed, Muslim religious clients report fear that their values will be undermined by secular counselling.

Currently, in Nigeria, the relationship between the three dominant ethnic groups, and with the addition of those from oil rich region, is the currently generating tension, especially among the youths. There is so much hostility and rancour towards each other largely due to their ill-conceived notion of the other. The fact that Boko Haram is killing people in the North does not mean that every northerner is a murderer or supports such heinous acts. It is in regard to something of this nature that Iyanat (2002) argues that atrocities like Boko haram murders highlights the need to recognise clients' who may benefit from counselling within a religious/spiritual framework, since such clients' face their own guilt by association with the perpetrators, as well as dealing with the anger of those around them. Furthermore, such

clients may be engaged in a difficult process of renegotiating their identity as members of the Muslim community.

The theoretical approaches as examined in this study include; the psychoanalytical approach (with its variants), the person-centred approach (with its variants), and cognitive behavioural approach (with its variants). The Freudian and neo-Freudian theories explain human actions and behaviours by invoking the unconscious at work within the individual's psyche, which should come under the control of the ego or self. The person-centred theories on the other hand, assume that human beings have the capacity to think and behave rationally; and that with subtle and indirect guidance (non-directive) from the counsellor, they are able to resolve their problems, empower themselves and become 'masters' of their destiny. The cognitive behavioural theories combine mental processes with human actions, which are reinforced when the client 'performs' the 'desired' behaviour or abstains from performing the undesired behaviour. These in the opinion of this researcher are the current, tried, trusted and reliable theories.

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By examining each theory critically and accepting that each theory has its unique contributions and cultural suit and relevance, counsellors can adopt theoretical approach that best fit to their multi-ethnic environment. While some authors and few researchers have tried to address the issues of multi-ethnic societies and multiculturalism, a wide gap in learning is still left in the area of application of appropriate counselling theory towards resolving the impasse. It is based on this that this researcher deemed it necessary to fill this gap. Hence, this paper investigated the counselling approaches to resolving clients' problems in a multi-ethnic society as perceived by guidance counsellors in Anambra State.

Purpose of the Study

This main purpose of this study is to investigate the perception of Guidance Counsellors in Anambra State on the counselling approaches to resolving clients' problems in a multi-ethnic society. Specifically, the study intends to find out

1. Approaches to counselling in a multi-ethnic society as perceived by Guidance Counsellors in Anambra State
2. Problems of counselling in a multi-ethnic society as perceived by Guidance Counsellors in Anambra State.

Research Questions

1. What are the approaches to counselling in a multi-ethnic society as perceived by Guidance Counsellors in Anambra State?

2. What are the problems of counselling in a multi-ethnic society?

METHOD

Descriptive survey research design was used to collect data for this study. The survey research design is considered appropriate for this investigation because it will help the researcher to collect standardized information from the respondents especially as the questionnaire was the data gathering instrument. The study was carried out in Anambra State of Nigeria. Anambra State is one of the thirty- six states of Nigeria. It is located in the South-Eastern part of the six geopolitical zones in the country, harbouring one of the dominant ethnic groups in Nigeria.

The population of the study comprises 145Guidance Counsellors from public secondary schools in Anambra State. (School Records: PPSSC, Awka, 2013).Since the population of the study is small, a census involving all the total population of the 145 school counsellors was carried out. Hence, all the counsellors were involved in the study.

The instrument consists of two questionnaires, namely, "Counsellors' Perception of Problems to Counselling in a Multi-Ethnic Society" (PCMESQ) and "Counsellors Perception of Approaches to counselling in a Multi-ethnic society" (ACMESQ). The instrument was duly validated by experts in Faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The internal consistency reliability levels are: r = 0.66 for PCMESQ and 0.69 for (ACMESQ). The researcher administered the instruments through direct delivery method, that is, the instruments were handed directly to the respondents and collected back after they have responded. Then, the data were collated, scored and analysed using mean for research question 1; the mean decision rule is 2.5, scores above 2.5 were "accepted", while scores below 2.5 were "not accepted". Also, research question 2 was analysed using percentages.

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RESULTS

In this section, data collected from the field for this study were analysed and the summaries were presented in tables below highlighting the findings. They are as follows:

Research Question 1

What are the approaches to counselling in a multi-ethnic society as perceived by Guidance Counsellors in Anambra State?

Table 1 showing counsellors' perception of the appropriateness of the theoretical approaches to counselling in a multi-ethnic society.

S/N	Theoretical Approaches	Frequency	%
1.	Adlerian	2	1.4%
2.	Behaviour modification	38	26.2%
3.	Cognitive behavioural	17	11.7%
4.	Eclectic	41	28.3%
5.	Erickson hypnosis	0	0%
6.	Existential	1	0.7%
7.	Family systems	1	0.7%
8.	Gestalt	0	0
9.	Multimodal	0	0
10.	Person-centred	5	3.4%
11.	Psychoanalytic	0	0%
12.	Psycho educational	0	0%
13.	Rational emotive	6	4.1%
14.	Reality	0	0%
15.	Integrative	34	23.4%
16.	Others not mentioned	0	0%

Table 2 above reveals the Guidance counsellors perception of the approaches to counselling in a multi-ethnic society. The finding as shown in the table indicates that a higher percentage of the counsellors; 41(28.3%) chose Eclectic, 38(26.2) behaviour modification, and 34(23.4) integrative approaches to counselling.

Research Question 2

What are the problems of counselling in a multi-ethnic society?

Table 1: showing the perception of counsellors on the problems of counselling in a multi-ethnic society

	Problems of counselling in a multi-ethnic society	Mean	Decision
1.	knowledge of the communities and cultures of different ethnic groups	2.35	Not accepted
2.	Approach to counselling	2.08	Not accepted
3.	Lack of knowledge and skills for evaluation and intervention	2.15	Not accepted
4.	Not recognizing that ethnicity and culture are significant parameters for understanding psychological processes	3.41	Accepted
5.	Beliefs, practices and values of the clients	3.30	Accepted
6.	Values, practices and beliefs of counsellors	2.34	Not accepted

7.	Not knowing the appropriate theory to apply	2.68	Accepted
8.	Ethnic prejudice	2.93	Accepted
9.	High level of illiteracy	2.89	Accepted
10.	Religion	2.52	Accepted
11.	Tribalism	3.70	Accepted
12.	Language barrier	3.66	Accepted
13.	Lack of familiarity with ethnic values	2.40	Not accepted

Table 2 above reveals that with the items scores of 3.66, 3.70, 2.52, 2.89, 2.93, 2.68, 3.30, and 3.41 for items 12, 11, 10, 9, 8, 7, 5 and 4, Guidance Counsellors in Anambra state agrees that language barrier, tribalism, religion, high level of illiteracy, ethnic prejudice, application of appropriate theory, Beliefs, practices and values of the clients, and not recognising that ethnicity and culture are significant parameters for understanding psychological processes are problems to counselling in a multi-ethnic society. The table equally reveals that with items scores of 2.40, 2.34, 2.15, 2.08 and 2.35 for items 13, 6, 3, 2 and 1, the counsellors did not agree that lack of familiarity with ethnic values, values, practices and beliefs of counsellors, lack of knowledge and skills for evaluation and intervention, approach to counselling and knowledge of the communities and cultures of different ethnic groups were problems to counselling in a multi-ethnic society.

DISCUSSION

Findings of this study revealed as shown in table 1 above, that a higher percentage of counsellors chose Eclectic, behaviour modification, integrative approaches to counselling as appropriate approaches to counselling a multi-ethnic society. This finding is in line with the statements of Pedersen, Draguns, Lonner and Trimble (2008) and, Sue and Sue, (2007) emphasising the need for counsellors to seek out ways of helping that do not place values held by the counsellor onto the client so that clients can find their own way of growing. They further stressed the need to seek out opportunities to gain insight into counsellors' personal views and motivations, and the views and motivations of those they serve; and develop new ways to engage in discussions of the many multicultural and social justice issues that the counselling profession and society face.

Sue and Sue, (2007) encourages counsellors to personally develop an action oriented approach to problem solving by choosing and adapting theories to the cultural settings on which they practice, stressing that some theories are not always applicable to all settings. The finding equally agree with Corey (1996), stressing that no one theory has a patent on the truth, and no single set of counselling theory is always effective in working with diverse populations.

Furthermore, findings from this study as shown in table 2 reveal that the problems to counselling in a multi-ethnic society ranges from language barrier, tribalism, religion, high level of illiteracy, ethnic prejudice, application of appropriate theory, beliefs, practices and values of the clients, and not recognising that ethnicity and culture are significant parameters for understanding psychological processes are problems to counselling in a multi-ethnic society. The findings of this study is in agreement with other researchers like Agbakwuru and Okpara (2013) whose earlier research finding pointed out that Nigerian youths have a lot of prejudices about other ethnic groups. He further stated that such prejudices makes Nigerian youths to fear and suspect people from other ethnic groups; remain constantly on guard when they come into contact with them; try to avoid them; feel insecure in their midst and hate them. \

The findings from the study equally agrees with Patel (2012), stating that a common barrier and/or catalyst to counselling a multi-ethnic society is comfort with native languages of the specific groups. Similarly, Jekayinfa (2002) equally pointed out that a major problem facing the developing nations of the world, especially those which are multi-ethnic and multilingual in their composition is how to integrate their diverse ethnic-linguistics groups. Pointing out further, Jekayinfa asserts that opinions were divergent on which language should be the indigenous official language emphasising that while some people supported Hausa, some supported Ibo and some Yoruba language, at the end however, no conclusion was reached. It

has been observed however, that if Nigeria wanted to use language as a cohesive force of effective nation-building, people must be resolved to face the challenges of tribalism, which has eaten deeply into the national structure.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions are drawn:

The problems to counselling in a multi-ethnic society includes; language barrier, tribalism, religion, high level of illiteracy, ethnic prejudice, application of appropriate theory, beliefs, practices and values of the clients, and not recognising that ethnicity and culture are significant parameters for understanding psychological processes are problems to counselling.

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Also, a higher percentage of the counsellors chose Eclectic, behaviour modification, integrative approaches to counselling among others as appropriate approaches to counselling a multi-ethnic society.

Implications of the Study

The findings of this study have enormous implication for counselling practice in Nigeria. These include;

1. The study has proffered solution for an effective and efficient counselling in a multi-ethnic society like Nigeria. Counsellors can now become more aware of the socio-political and economic environment influencing the lives of each ethnic group in Nigeria. This will now put them in a position to seek for ways to address the problems that may arise.
2. Also, findings from the study show the varying opinion of the counsellors on the appropriateness of the theories in resolving clients' problem in a multi-ethnic society. This finding further affirms the need for counsellors to critically examine each counselling theory, and become more aware of the cultural qualities of each counselling theory and tradition so that they could be in position to choose appropriate theory to suit their counselling environment.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Guidance counsellors should educate themselves to the cultures of their clients, especially to the importance of their family, community, beliefs and aspirations. There is also the need to assess prejudices and stereotypes and to develop counselling approach that is positive towards multiculturalism, and the way in which the values and their thoughts can affect the counselling and therapy.
2. Counsellors need to develop the capacity to know his or her own approach to the world and to become an expert on different cultures. That is, he or she should not only possess knowledge and specific information on the cultures of the people receiving counselling but should also understand socio-political influences and the appropriate counselling theory to apply.
3. The issue of counselling in a multi-ethnic society should be made to form a focal point in government's agenda. Counsellors should be trained and retrained in this area, and funds should be made available for counsellors to organise community outreach programme aimed towards resolving inter-ethnic conflicts and pushing for mutual, peaceful coexistence of all Nigerians, irrespective of ethnic origin.

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