

# COUNSELLING STRATEGIES FOR ENHANCING STUDENT'S FURTHER EDUCATION AND CAREER READINESS

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## **Abstract**

*This paper examined Counselling strategies for enhancing secondary school students' readiness for career and further education. Secondary school students tend to make wrong subject combinations and career choices. These negatively affect students' progress in pursuing higher education. Some other effects include, delay in gaining admission and spending of extra years before graduating from higher institutions. The paper stressed the need for school Counsellors to offer professional assistance in ensuring students' smooth and profitable transition from secondary school to tertiary institution enrollment. Counselling strategies that are helpful in improving students' readiness practices as proposed in this study include: creation of positive mind-set in students; establishment of motivational programs that will enhance students' preparation for further education, organization of periodic workshops and seminars for SSS students' enlightenment about careers and readiness; and use of technological innovation like SMS, WhatsApp and Facebook chats to provide information that will enhance students' readiness.*

**Keywords** Counselling Strategies, Enhancing, Readiness, Career, Further Education

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The growing demands of the 21st century workforce connote that, high school graduates should be fully prepared for further studies and careers. Across the United States of America (USA), college and career readiness is the new norm (Achieve, 2016b). Also Bidwell (2013) submitted that, only 26% of high school graduates reached the college readiness benchmarks in readiness tests. Moving everyone to the college readiness level is therefore, a challenge.

In Nigeria, secondary school education system is a 6-year programme of 3 (three) year Junior Secondary School (JSS) and 3 (three) years Senior Secondary School (SSS). A major goal of secondary education in Nigeria is to prepare students for higher education (FRN, 2004). Final year Senior Secondary School (SSS 3) students are expected to have chosen their careers and attained readiness for further education.

However, the trend has been students' inability to cope with the demands of higher education as evidenced by poor performances in qualifying examinations such as Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) and Post-JAMB examinations. Corroborating this fact, Odoma (2016) appealed for understanding concerning poor JAMB performance while MyeduNigeria (2016) gave 10 (ten) reasons why students failed 2015 JAMB Computer Based Test (CBT). Some students not only perform poorly (scoring below 200) in JAMB examination, but also perform poorly in the Post-JAMB examination, that is, the entrance examination given to prospective students in each university.

Furthermore, some secondary school students make wrong career choices and subject combinations. Some choose careers as a result of parental pressure, peer pressure and popularity of the careers, at the detriment of their own interests and skills. Omotosho (2014) decried the alarming rate at which Nigerian youths make wrong career choices as a result of inadequate guidance. Furthermore, some students make wrong subject combinations. For instance, a secondary school student that desires to pursue further education in medicine but has social science subject combinations only, is off-track the proposed career choice.

The foregoing suggests serious setbacks for students in their pursuits of careers and further education. Some are disqualified at the point of registration, even if offered admission into tertiary institutions. Some are not able to secure admission for a long time while some will spend prolonged years in tertiary institutions before graduating. Some will have to change courses after 3 or 4 years in the university (after being withdrawn or put on probation) and move to other less-demanding course areas to start all over. It is against this background that, this study proposes that, the school Counsellor, who is a professional in addressing students' personal, social, academic and career problems should be engaged in devising strategies of curbing the anomalies to ensure secondary school students' readiness for further education and careers. The paper focuses on the concepts of Counselling; readiness problems of secondary school students and Counselling strategies for enhancing students' career and further education readiness.

### **CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS**

**Counselling:** Counselling is a systematic process, activity or relationship between a professional Counsellor and a client or group of clients, who seek to acquire more understanding of self and environment towards taking a more rational decision in solving the problem (Tor-Anyiin, 2015). Generally, Counselling falls under the umbrella term, "talking therapies" where it allows people to discuss their challenges and any difficult feelings they encounter in a safe and confidential environment. It is a private talking cure, a relationship of trust, interview, or interaction between a Counsellor and a client(s) that allow the client(s) to freely talk about their problems and feelings in a confidential.

dependable and non-threatening atmosphere. The aim of such interaction is to achieve a positive change in the client's behaviour or provide conditions that are conducive to voluntary change in the client's behaviour so that he or she can live a happy, balanced, productive and self satisfying life. Consequently, Counsellors occupy vantage position in Counselling students on career problems.

**Career readiness:** Readiness is the preparedness of an individual to take an action in a given situation. Career readiness is the extent to which students possess the skills and attitudes needed for advancing in a career path. It is also the possession and demonstration of requisite competencies that adequately prepare students for a successful transition from school to work place. The competencies are in the area of problem solving, oral and, or, written communication, team work, professionalism, social skills, and application of information technology.

**Further education:** Further education is the form of education that occurs after a given school level. In this context, it is when secondary school students go beyond the secondary school level of education and secure admission into other institutions of higher learning such as Universities, Colleges, Polytechnics and Monotechnics.

**Counselling strategies:** In this context, Counselling strategies are high level professional techniques used by a Counsellor to assist and encourage students to continue their education beyond the secondary school level as well as to adequately prepare for their respective career dreams.

## **FURTHER EDUCATION READINESS PROBLEMS OF SECONDARY SCHOOLSTUDENTS**

Secondary school students aspiring to embark on further education are often plagued with the following problems:

- i. **Inadequate Information:** Secondary school students lack adequate career information on available careers. Students are not very familiar with varieties of options in Science, Arts, Social Science and Engineering courses that can be studied in tertiary institutions. Generally, secondary school students assume that, "Medicine" and "Pharmacy" are the main options for science students; "Law" for Arts students and "Accounting" for students in commercial class. According to Martin (2010), many students lack the guidance needed to prepare for enrollment and success in College.
- ii. **Career Selection Problems:** Certain careers are often chosen because they are professional courses and for the future prospects or marketability of such careers. The problem is that, not all science students have the capability to study Medicine or Pharmacy. Some students that would have been great achievers in single courses like plant science, zoology, microbiology, biochemistry, biology and so on, wrongly pursue courses like Medicine, Pharmacy and later become dropouts or encounter setbacks in their career progressions. According to Bidwell (2014), some schools seem to belittle the Counsellor's role of promoting students'

readiness for further education. The assumption is that, students will just figure it out somehow.

- iii. **Wrong Subject Combinations:** Some secondary school students pick wrong subject combinations for JAMB examinations. For instance, a candidate seeks to study “Engineering” in a tertiary institution but fails to sit for Mathematics in JAMB examination. This automatically disqualifies the candidate for admission. Some erroneously refuse to write Mathematics examination by replacing it with other presumed easier subjects like Government, Christian Religious Knowledge (C.R.K.) and so on. The perception is that, high scores in those subjects will give them high JAMB score. However, a high JAMB score from wrong subject combination renders the candidate ineligible for admission. Also, a candidate that secures admission to study “English Education” but has no credit in “English Literature” at the Senior secondary School (SSS) Certificate Examination may be disqualified during registration in a higher institution (University).
- iv. **Poor Performance in Qualifying Examination:** In Nigeria, the national qualifying examinations are organized by JAMB. Generally, a JAMB score of 200 and above makes a candidate eligible for admission. However, because of the high population of candidates seeking admission and the high level of competition involved, it is advisable for candidates to have high JAMB score of 250 and above, to be at advantaged positions. Also, the Post-JAMB (organized by different universities) is another qualifying examination. High scores in JAMB (For instance, 250 and above) and in Post-JAMB (Example, 60% and above) are required to place candidates seeking admission at vantage positions. A candidate that possesses high JAMB score but low score in Post-JAMB is not in favourable position for admission.
- v. **Deficiencies in Core Subjects:** The general entry requirement into Universities in Nigeria is possession of 5 (five) credit passes including the core subjects (English Language and Mathematics) and any other 3 relevant subjects. Deficiency in any of the core subjects renders the candidate ineligible for admission. Some candidates have 7 (seven) credits minus a core subject and a relevant subject. These are impediments to securing admission into a higher institution especially a University.

Generally, the aforementioned problems mitigate against the secondary school students' progress in pursuing higher education. The resultant effects include delay in securing admission, spending of extra years for courses of study, poor or weak graduation grades, switching of courses (where permitted) as well as outright withdrawal from courses of study. The need to address these anomalies is therefore apparent. It is critical to ensure that, high school graduates are prepared for post - secondary success.

## **HOW TO ENHANCE STUDENTS' FURTHER EDUCATION AND CAREER READINESS**

Counselling strategies, as used in this study, connote carefully designed plans or techniques to be utilized by school Counsellors in assisting students to achieve desired goals. The goals of further education and career readiness of secondary school students can be aided as follows:

- I. Creating positive mindset in students:** School Counsellors can help students form positive mind-set about going to a higher institution of learning. Counsellors should build in students, the aspiration for further studies. Students should have the perception that all-round success in the secondary school final examinations will be stepping stones to further studies. A positive mind-set energizes a student to put in necessary hard work and resilience to overcome obstacles on the way.
- ii. Establishing Motivational Programmes:** Counsellors should establish motivational programmes that will enhance students' preparation for further studies and careers. Gifts should be given to achieving students to encourage others. The Counsellor should announce examination dates of different higher institutions to students and encourage them to apply to at least 1 (one) higher institution, while in school (final year). Students who gained admission into higher institutions should be given special recognition by the school.
- iii. Organizing Periodic Workshops and Seminars:** The Counsellor should organize seminars and workshops periodically, for senior secondary school students to supply them with necessary career information. Seminars organized should encourage students' quest for further education and provide information on:
  - a). Available career options.
  - b). Entry requirements into tertiary institutions.
  - c). Admission processes.
  - d). Financial implications of schools selected.School Counsellors play significant roles in guiding students towards further education and career readiness. In line with this, Adams (2014) posited that, Counsellors should no longer be satisfied with waiting for students or clients to come to them, but should take initiative to reach out to students. Organization of periodic workshops and seminars for students is a step forward.
- iv. Guiding Students to fill Admission Forms:** Counsellors can provide guidance to students in filling tertiary institutions application forms. Such include filling of JAMB forms and selection of schools in relation to careers chosen.
- v. Use of Technological Innovations:** In this era of technology, Counsellors should explore the use of technological innovations to provide further guidance to students to enhance their further education and career readiness. Individual text messages (SMS): WhatsApp (individual and group chats), Facebook, E-mail messages, among others, can be used to communicate with students. Students can



respond individually and make inquiries where necessary.

- vi. **Teaching Career Readiness Skills:** The school Counsellor, as part of group Counselling awareness, can introduce senior students' career readiness skills. Such training should cover concepts like writing curriculum vitae (CV), interview attendance, communication and entrepreneurship.

### **Conclusion**

Students' need for support and guidance in getting ready for further education and careers has been x-rayed. The school Counsellor by training is a professional that is capable of guiding students towards further education and career readiness. Effective strategies to be used in accomplishing this task have been highlighted. Imbibing these Counselling strategies could be transformative; especially in promoting students' readiness for further education and careers.

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