

Counselling Persons with Visual Impairment for Effective Career Choice: Implication for National Development

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Abstract

This paper discussed the place of counselling for persons with visual impairment for effective career choice. This study is mainly significant in two respects: the place of counselling within the radius of Nigerian education has been downplayed as it is very possible to enrol in primary, secondary and tertiary education without formal counselling for once, and secondly, it draws attention to the counselling needs of persons with visual impairment on career choice which is indispensable because of their 'special' character. Career choice is an important issue in every man's life. For persons with visual impairment, making a career choice is not always easy, and making an effective choice requires the inputs of many professionals amongst whom are the guidance counsellors. One technique through which counselling achieves results is through career education. Critical as career education and counselling may be, both have received less significance attention which invariably impinge on the success of persons with visual impairment in making effective career choices. Many persons with visual impairment have lost out on their ambition for lack of proper counselling. For effective counselling on career choice, amongst the counsellor's strategy will be the need to seek and use the parents' knowledge in developing the counselling programmes or manuals, development and maintenance of effective communication between parents and the counsellors/professionals, and explanation of what is being recommended and why it is done. The paper concluded that in counselling persons with visual impairment on career choices, counsellors should among other things assess the strength of available resources, the interest of the visually impaired person, the intellectual capacity of the student, the excellent of the handicapping condition and the nature of the economy.

Keywords: counselling, visual, impairment, career, national, development.

INTRODUCTION

Education is an indispensable medium of bringing about the development of citizens either normal or handicapped. The wealth, strength, social and economic wellbeing of a nation is direct consequence of its technological advancement and development of humanities (Umoru, 2005). Education is a pivot on which the nation's development rotates. It is the concern of government to provide education to all her citizens without discrimination on grounds of disability, gender, religion, tribe, socio- economic background or otherwise (Omede, 2009).

Educating persons with visual impairment is problematic. This is because an individual with visual impairment is confronted with a number of challenges ranging from participation in social activities, locomotion, and education to mention a few. It is more expensive to educate children with visual impairment than their sighted peers. This is as a result of high cost of equipment and materials used in educating them (Chukuka, 2009). The author explains further that the cost of braille machines, type writers, moving to and from the school, church,

mosque and other places of importance is definitely higher for children with visual impairment than the sighted children, since they have need for a companion most of the time. Obani (2004) affirmed that a child with physical disability such as blindness may not be able to move around easily and may have to be carried for a longer time than a non-disabled child. Unlike sighted children who can easily learn so many things merely by observing and imitating, the child with visual impairment will need to be guided and supervised when learning so many concepts, thus requiring more time to be cared for. Research has shown that loss of vision is associated with difficulties in performing basic activities of daily living, functional and educational activities thereby reducing the welfare state of the individual. In accordance with this, special educators, guidance counsellor, psychologists and allied specialists should work in collaboration in ensuring the provision of equality education and counselling services for persons with visual impairment. Students with visual impairment receive special education and related services in a variety of settings that bring them into contact with a range of personnel (Susan and Kay,

2005). With educational attainment this group of persons can live up to societal expectation and contribute their quota to national development. Career choice is a critical issue in every learner's life. The choice of career for an individual is as important as the choice of a life partner in marriage. This is because, like marriage, a person lives with his chosen career for a life time and changing it will require the individual to start learning the ropes afresh-a task that is practically unenviable. Thus, career choice has the capacity to make or shatter one's joy and sense of fulfilment depending on the outcome. Therein lies the importance of this study to scholars and readers as the paper considers salient considerations for career placement of persons with visual impairment. As a special educator, educational administrator, civil society group advancing the cause of persons with visual impairment or even a relative of persons with visual impairment, know-how on effective career placement of these persons may turn out be the best contribution one can make to their life. This is because for persons with visual impairment, the issue of career choice is dicey and must be handled with professionalism especially in the area of counselling for reasons that this paper will seek to explore.

The scope of this paper is limited to persons with visual impairments and the career opportunities that abounds through visual handicap education.

VISUAL IMPAIRMENT

According to Okeke (2001), the visually impaired are those pupils who have difficulty in seeing which necessitates the use of special educational methods or adaptation to materials and who needs to use special aids equipment for learning. A child with visual impairment therefore refers to one who has a significant loss or damage which makes him or her to function more as a blind person than as a sighted child. Blindness is a devastating physical condition with deep emotional and economic implications. The consequences affect not only the individual but also the family and the community (Bakare, 2011). Abang (2002) adds further that, the loss of vision after illness or trauma causes major changes in life style, habits of the blind person which may result in problems in psychological adjustment. Persons with visual impairment may have short-sightedness, long sightedness or low vision and often suffer stigmatization. This shows that the person will experience frustrations at one time or the other. Restriction of movement is another impairment frustration which the individual may encounter. Despite their condition, Eniola (2003) noted that people with visual impairment can go to school and acquire knowledge and experience which is the primary purpose of information in ability to see an interesting scene. The author stated further that they only rely more on auditory experiences for forming concepts. They can be trained in the skill of listening,

mobility training both mental and physical orientation.

Fundamentally, the concept of educating the visually impaired persons is to make them literate, self-reliant, and useful to the society (Omede, 2009). People with visual impairment like everyone else, pursue a great range of interests and career including the full range of daily activities. The visually impaired individuals have to receive training in various adaptive techniques in order to meet the challenges of daily activities. The adaptive techniques involve the strategies used by the blind to communicate with the sighted world and the means to adapt to independent movement \travel without the use of a sighted guide. The accomplishment of these techniques depends greatly on the use of assistive technology (Ntukidem and Ashi 2009).

It is interesting to know that people with visual impairment have the potentials to learn various skills that can make them useful if properly guided by relevant professionals. With these skills they can lead an independent life and be socially inclusive in most aspects. However, the individual's educational career and life orientation may change drastically because loss of vision limits one to narrow his or her choice or present ability. The impact of visual impairment is experienced by an individual as he/she strives to cope with his/her society and to overcome attitudes and obstacles that prevent him/her from being fully integrated into the society (Maimuna, 2012). The author stressed further that psychology, if applied to the education of the visually handicap, will help them to treat their disturbances and encourage more responsible behaviour among individual members that are visually impaired. In the words of Olaniyan in Chukuka (2010), since parents are ignorant of knowledge or information regarding impaired condition and are ill – equipped with information regarding how they can effectively care for the child, they find it difficult to make appropriate decision on how to refer the impaired child for diagnostic test, select appropriate educational placement and career for their child. According to the author, parents' anxiety, ignorance and negative attitude could be tackled through counselling. The state of emotional distress and attitude on the side of the parents indicates that they need someone who will educate them on how to adjust and manage their child with visual impairment to realise his potential (Chukuka, 2010).

The usefulness of educating persons with visual impairment cannot be over emphasized, this is because their potentiality have to be developed, in all human endeavour and for economic sustainability, provided they have the skills that can be trained for career choice, the appropriate professional should be employed to assist them to realise the objectives

which gives them ample opportunity to contribute to national development. Since everyone is potentially disabled, if blindness occurs, the counsellors should be skillful enough to fill the gap so that their career choice will not be undermined.

What is Counselling?

Counselling is an interaction between two or more people; one is a trained professional who is ready to give expertise assistance of guidance to the party that is burdened with some educational or contending issues. These issues could be psychological, educational, or career problems (Chukuka, 2010). Olukotun (2003) noted that counselling is an advice given to individual or group of people to assist them overcome their social, mental, emotional, physical, vocational, educational and psychological problems. Counselling is a means by which parents and families of children with visual impairment are given enlightenment, support, information and encouragement about visual impairment and how to adjust and manage the affected child to realise his potentials. A counsellor must be an individual who is specially trained in the scientific process using psychological principles for assisting individuals, solving their academic, socio-cultural, psycho-motor, vocational, health and emotional problems (Ozaji, 2005). It is expected of a guidance counsellor to invite persons with visual impairment who have excelled in the society in a planned setting to discuss and demonstrate his or her achievements which will invariably motivate other special needs children to strive for greatness. Omede (2011) asserted that the participation of people with visual impairment in the educational sector will help them to contribute their quota to the nation's economy and benefit vital political dividends.

It is a known fact that once an individual enrolls in the school system, he/she is faced with variety of career choices which necessitates the need for a guidance counsellor who makes it easy for the student to know the career that he/she is most likely cut out for. The services of a guidance counsellor are so essential for persons with visual impairment in view of their limited choices. For instance, since they cannot study some science related courses unlike their sighted counterparts, they need to be carefully guided to make the best of limited opportunities. It is not an easy task to arrive at career choices, therefore it is imperative for visually impaired students to be provided with a guidance counsellor right from the secondary level so that they can identify their relevant careers.

The primary aim of counselling is to give professional assistance to someone by creating opportunities and suitable environment for the personal, social, educational and vocational growth of the individual which makes him happier and more

effective in his or her daily living and decision making skills. Shikulen (2012) posits that educating students including visual impairment by today's standards and for tomorrows living most certainly includes the use of assistive technology. Access to assistive technology can provide meaningful learning experiences to develop problem solving and higher thinking skills and to function in the world beyond the classroom. The guidance counsellor is required to among other things; assess the strength of available educational resources, the intellectual capacity of visually impaired students and structure of the country's economy in helping to assist persons with visual impairments in making effective career choices.

Career Education and National Development

Career education encompasses the development of knowledge, skills and attitudes through a planned programme of learning experiences in education and training settings that will assist students to make informed decisions about their study and/or work options and enable them to participate effectively in working life (State of Queensland 2001). At secondary school level, career guidance and counselling services are provided to students, and the ministry of education recognizes the importance of these services. Deciding on the future career is not quite easy; it is more difficult when you lack the necessary information on the different types of career (Joyce and Lydia, 2011). It is, yet, more difficult where it involves choosing careers for or by persons with visual impairment. Career education cannot be degraded because it involves special children's aspirations and interests in totality. In fact, Sydney P. Marland was the first to use the term 'career education' publicly in 1971. As the then commissioner of education in America, he used the term while addressing the National Association of Secondary School Principals in Houston, Texas. In the address, he described career education as a concept of merging the academic and the vocational curricular into a new educational entity termed career education. He observed that only little percentage of students currently in high school would go on to academic college level work. Since this is so, he called on the authorities to ensure that the rest of the students who drop out before earning a *bacca laureate* degree should be made to undertake occupational training of some sort instead of getting what he described as educational pap. He emphasized the need to equip students with the needed skills that would assist them to make their living at whatever point they left school for the labour market.

Persons with visual impairment have ventured into different careers. The Foundation Fighting Blindness (2000) listed a sample of careers that people with visual impairment have chosen: Accountants, insurance advocate, keyboarding, masseur, banking,

child care assistant etc. according to the foundation, a good starting point is to find out what interests you most. The foundation further stated that a person with visual impairment is limited only by his desire, some common sense and appreciation of reality. Careers and jobs are important part of everyone's life. Getting the proper training, writing a resume, getting an interview and eventually a job are all vital to a feeling of achievement and success. Success, however, doesn't always come easily, especially for persons with visual impairment. Career education is therefore an indispensable tool towards enabling persons with visual impairment to actualize their career interests and aspirations to be self-reliant and contributors to national development. One field that hold much prospect for persons with visual impairment is vocational education.

According to Bello and Bello (1997), the central objective of the vocational education to the people with special needs is to make them apart from being teachers acquire the skills necessary to make them live a productive, self-sustaining and less dependent life. The authors stressed further that the areas in vocational education which the people with special needs can choose a career includes: Fine and Applied Arts, Agriculture Education, Business Education, Home Economics, Music, Computer and Theatre Arts Education. Apart from the above listed career choices, persons with visual impairment can be counselled on law, special education, and guidance and counselling, etc. These careers will no doubt afford them the opportunity to contribute actively to national development and self-sustainability. It is important for any guidance counsellor who is willing to counsel persons with visual impairment on career choice, to adopt the following strategies as elaborated by Bolchit and Dorathy (2011):

1. To seek and use the parents' knowledge in developing the counselling programmes or manuals. This is to enable the counsellor assess the level of understanding of parents before using some terminologies in session.
2. Development and maintenance of effective communication between parents and the counsellors/professionals is very important. Effective counselling is achieved when communication is maintained as any silence signals a sign of failure or lack of interest from both parties.
3. Explanation of what is being recommended and why it is done helps in establishing good rapport for counselling
4. The counsellor should use a very good and appropriate approach in trying to explain the conditions associated with good posture and gait to the parents.

Provided they can have successful education with the help of special education teachers, regular teachers

and easy access to assistive technology, effective counselling services, they will make fine career choices that will make them useful in both public and private sectors of the economy. Education has gone through a lot of changes and reforms for the betterment of mankind. Special education as part of the main body of education has and is still going through changes and reforms to meet the daily and challenging needs of the individuals involved in receiving and making use of it (Bolchit 2009).

Goals of Career Education

Following the leadership of Dr. Marland, the Bureau of Adult, Vocational and Technical Education, United States Office of Education (1971) set forth the following as the goals of career education:

1. To provide more relevant subject matter via restructuring the current curriculum around a career development orientation.
2. To provide all individuals prior to learning school, the opportunity to develop marketable skills.
3. To provide all individuals appropriate guidance and counselling to develop self-awareness, to enlarge career awareness and to develop appropriate attitude towards work.
4. To provide all individuals who complete secondary school the knowledge and skills necessary to secure gainful employment.
5. To provide placement services for individuals for either employment or further education purposes.
6. To promote greater involvement of the educational system to use all possible community resources (Brolin, 1976).

CONCLUSION

Career is important part of everyone's life making an effective career depends largely on the quality of available counselling services. Counselling is dicey to career choice especially when the recipients are persons with visual impairment. Successful counselling on career choice invariably involves a sound career education to enlighten the visually impaired individual of the implications of a career decision. Career education and counselling deserves urgent attention and must be given more prominence being an indispensable tool towards enabling persons with visual impairment to actualize their career interests and aspirations to be self-reliant and contributors to national development. In counselling persons with visual impairment on career choices, counsellors should among other things assess the strength of available resources, the intellectual capacity of the student, the interest of the students, the extent of handicapping condition and the nature of the economy. When these factors are taken into cognizance, the chances of persons with visual impairment making right and effective career choices

will be very high. An effective career choice no doubt will impact positively on national development.

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