

GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING AS A PANACEA FOR YOUTH EMPLOYABILITY IN A GLOBAL COMPETITIVE ECONOMY

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Abstract

This paper discussed Guidance and Counselling as a panacea to youth employability in a global competitive economy. The paper discussed who a youth is the concept of employability, employability skills needed by the youth to make it in a global competitive economy. The concept of guidance and counselling and its aims were equally discussed. The study went further to close the gap between guidance and counselling and employability in a global economy. Some recommendations were made to the counsellors to be more committed to their work and voluntarily offer cognitive behavioural therapy to youths during career talks and PTA meetings in schools and during orientation of youth corps at camp. It was also recommended that government should come to the aid of guidance and counselling by making the services available, effective and sustainable across all the educational institutions and other social institutions in Nigeria.

Keywords: Guidance and Counselling, Youth, Employability, Employability Skills, Global Competition Economy

Introduction

School graduates stand at the dawn of their careers, seeking meaningful and gainful work in a labour market that is characterised by unpredictable change and globalisation. This new world of work requires flexibility, versatility, and creativity skills not customarily required of an employee. Graduates nowadays are inevitably expected to develop a skill-set that enables proactive career behaviour and, furthermore, aids the employer to use such abilities as business solutions. Today's employers are not only looking for skills specific to the job but are also seeking for persons who possess general job skills such as communication, teamwork, problem solving, initiative and enterprise, planning and organizing, self-management, learning, and technology. People may not feel they have any such job skills but

if they are dependable, easy to get along with, and open to learning new things, this is a clear indication they possess such indispensable employability skills (i.e. the skills needed to be work ready). There is a lack of consensual scientific knowledge available on employability, despite the rise in its prominence in the 21st century employer and graduate employee. This is especially true for Cameroon context. This paper as a panacea of youth's employability in a global competitive economy facilitates college graduates toward their employability through the effective use of career guidance programmes and services. The effectiveness of school based guidance and counselling program prepares the students toward the global challenges of the 21st century in the field of work. The students choose a career direction which facilitate them to enroll in courses that are suitable and necessary to achieve their personal aspirations and career success (Stone, 2005). In schools, guidance counsellors render services to cater for the needs of students toward appropriate career decisions through guidance and counselling programmes. They facilitate employability among their students by equipping them with the right skills, experiences and attitudes required in the workforce. They are the master initiators for students to be functionally accomplished to understand that their present course preferences would influence their future educational and career choices. They are obliged to address career concerns through the implementation of career programmes that permit the counsellors to increase students' competences towards employability trends. The success in the labour market requires the use of effective career management strategies as a supplement to educational and vocational expertise. The thrust of educational institutions is to assist students in preparing for their careers (Hirshi, 2009). The necessity of guidance and counselling and planning programmes in schools is to attain basic principles attached to career preparation and enhance the expansion of career decisiveness. The employability of graduates can be considered as an instrument to measure the effectiveness of the standards and policies of school attended.

Youths' employability can be assessed as a relevant academic input to the study programmes such as courses that are taught, programme design, availability of educational equipment, students' skills, behaviour, and career graduate attributes from the perspective of the alumni themselves and their employees. Therefore, schools are bound to elevate guidance and counselling programmes and services to soothe changes toward student development and attain the right job or employment after graduation. This is because the objectives of having guidance and counselling services in school are to enhance the connection between schools and industry, thereby enriching the employability of graduates. With this concept in mind, the study was undertaken in order to address guidance and counselling as a panacea for youth employability in a global competitive economy.

Most youths do not consider guidance and counselling as a significant issue, hence, they have no or very little realization about its importance. At this point, one would want to know how guidance and counselling plays an important role in increasing youth's employability in a global competitive economy.

Who is a Youths?

According to National Youth Development Policy (2001) a youth is any person within the age of 18 – 35 years (Anasi, 2010). Youth is the part of life that succeed childhood; the

period of existence preceding maturity or the whole part of life from infancy to manhood (Elegbeleye, 2005). In the context of Nigerians experience youths have rendered valuable contribution to the liberation and national development. They can constitute a reservoir of energy and dynamism for any national struggle if they are correctly guided, mobilized and fully integrated in the social fabric of the nation. They may also constitute a threat to national survival and stability if they are allowed to drift, unemployed, undisciplined and morally bankrupt. No nation aspiring to major national greatness can afford to ignore the youths and allow constituting a major social problem. They are vital source of man power and do possess leadership potential, can acquire knowledge and are full of future promises. Once this innate potential in them are fully exploited and properly channeled their contribution to national development can be immense (Chukuezi, 2009).

Concept of Employability

Employability denotes a person's ability to gain employment. It refers to a person's capabilities of gaining initial employment, maintaining employment and obtaining new employment if need be. Simply put, employability is about being capable of getting and keeping fulfilling work, while comprehensively it is the capability to move self-sufficiently within the labour market to realize potential through sustainable employment (Brown & Hesketh, 2004). De Grip, VanLoo and Sanders (2004) considered employability as the capacity and the willingness of workers to remain attractive for the labour market by reacting and anticipating on changes in tasks and work environment, facilitated by the human resource development instruments offered to them. This means that being employable involves both the capacity and the willingness to be and to remain attractive for the labour market, by anticipating changes in tasks and work environment and reacting to them. Olakotan (2010) explained that graduates' employability depends on the knowledge, skills and attitudes they possess, the way they use those assets and present them to employers and the context (e.g. personal circumstances and labour market environment) within which they seek.

An alternative explanation of employability takes a more relative approach. Brown and Hesketh (2004) defined employability as the relative chances of getting and maintaining different kinds of employment. While most people view employability in absolute terms, focusing on the need for individuals to obtain credentials, knowledge and social status, the concept of employability can also be seen as subjective and dependent on contextual factors. Brown and Hesketh (2004) state that 'Employability not only depends on whether one is able to fulfil the requirements of specific jobs, but also on how one stands relative to others within a hierarchy of job seekers'. This challenges the idea that credentials, knowledge and social status alone will guarantee a good position in the labour market. With the move to a more knowledge based economy, it is widely thought that there is an increasing demand for high-calibre managerial talent. However, a focus on obtaining skills in order to gain good employment has led to an over-supply of graduates and a larger number of candidates racing for the same top jobs. Brown and Hesketh (2004) argued that there is a clear mismatch between individuals' expectations of employability and the realities posed by the labour market. Under these conditions, students would use a number of strategies in the labour market to maintain competitive advantage. Brown and Hesketh identify two ideal types of individuals entering the labour market.

The above view of employability incorporates the dual aspect of supply and demand of labour to show that advancing one's position in the labour market by gaining credentials is partially dependent on structural factors outside the individual's control. Entry into the world of work is contingent upon having employability skills required by the workplace. Heldrich (2005) asserted that it is difficult to find graduates who are well prepared and that possess the skills needed to be successful in the place of work. Preparing students for the workplace requires that instructional contents in educational institutions should be improved by making it more relevant to what is happening in the workplace. Carnevale, Gainer and Meltzer in Olakotan (2010) asserted that to help learners acquire relevant skills, educators need to teach future employees how to make decisions, how to solve problems, how to learn, how to think a job through from start to finish, and how to work with people to get the job done. Carnevale, et. al. also pointed out that educators need to link the teaching of academic subjects to real work applications and work with employers to strengthen the link between learning in school and learning on the job.

Concept of Employability Skills

Robinson (2000) explained that employability skills are the fundamental skills needed by someone to seize, retain, and carry out his duties properly, employability skills cover the skills, attitudes, and behaviors that help a person to be able to cooperate with others in their work, as well as being able to adapt to the changing demands of the job (Robinson, 2000). Knight and Yorke (2004) proposed employability skills as a skill, understanding and personal attributes that make graduates more likely to get a job and to be successful in their job choices, provide benefits for individuals who own it, work environment, society and any economics (The ESECT (Enhancing Student Employability Co-ordination Team; 2006)(Cole and Tibby (2013). Whereas Sanders and Grib stated that employability skills are characteristics owned by a person who is related to the ability of working and wishes to continue to engage in the activity of the working world (Sumarno, 2008)). Bloom and Kitagawa (1999) in The Conference Board of Canada employability skills explained that employability skills are the generic skills, attitudes and behaviours that are desired by employers against new workers and these skills can be developed through various training programs. Overtoom defined the employability skills as basic skills which represent the essential capabilities and functions in the knowledge, skills, and attitudes essential required by the workforce of the 21st century, as well as necessary for career success at all levels of work and for all levels of education (Yahya & Kemahiran, 2006) Weaver and DeLuca et al (2014) argued employability skills as personal, social, behavioral, and daily living habits which have been identified as being important to the employers and workers who will enter on job entry, employability skills are great life skills to be taught as the necessity of teaching the basic skills. Confederation of British Industry explained that employability skills are the qualities and competence owned by an individual that is required in order to meet the needs of entrepreneurs and customers and is a skill that helps to realize the aspirations and potential of individuals at work (McQuaid & Lindsay; 2005). In the workforce, employability skills have been widely known despite their naming sometimes differs between one country and the other. It is as mentioned by Wilton that the other terms of employability skills is core work skills, both refer to the same sense which is the skills required by the workforce needs to be owned by every individual, men and

women, in order to be able to work with a qualified result (Buchori,2015). National Centre for Vocational Education Research listed various terms of employability skills in some countries. For example in United Kingdom; the core Skills, key skills, general skills, New Zealand; essential skills, Australia; key skills, skills for work, generic skills, Canada; Skills for work, United States; basic skills, important skills, knowledge of how to work, generic skills, Singapore; critical thinking skills, France; skills that can be transferred, Germany; key Qualifications, Switzerland; interdisciplinary Goals, as well as Denmark; independent qualification process (Widido, 2009).

Some organizations or associations also provide terminology regarding the employability skills, for instance, ASEAN uses the term core work skills; Latin America uses the term Key Competencies, Work Competencies; European Cmsn uses the term Key Competencies; The OECD uses the term Key Competencies; ILO uses the term Core Work Skills/Core Skills for Employability; and EVAGMR uses Transferable Skills (Buchori, 2015). In addition, core skills, key skills, transferable skills, general skills, non-technical skills, soft skills, essential skills are some of the similar terms used as employability skills according to NCVER (Suarta, 2010). ILO as an International Labour Organization under the auspices of the United Nations gives a definition about employability skill as a skill, knowledge, and competencies that can improve the ability of employees to survive on their work, develop their career and overcome obstacles they face, and can easily get another job in the workplace if they are willing to. (Brewer, 2013). Further perspective according to ILO employability skills enable individuals to continue to acquire and apply new knowledge and skills. For terminology, ILO uses the term core work skills or core skills for employability. A publication of the Confederation of British industry (CBI) in 1998 defined the employability skills as a quality and competencies required to meet the changing needs of employers and customers and with realizing the aspirations and potential of a person (Turner, 2002). Yorke explained that the employability skills are the skills, understanding, and personal attributes which make the graduates more likely to get a job and succeeding in the job they choose (Lowden, Hall, Elliot, and Lewin; 2011). Employability skills are generic skills required by all levels of the work type (Suarta, 2010). Bennet mentioned that the greatest challenge faced by the education world nowadays is producing alumni who have the adequate abilities in terms of academic (academic skills), skills mastery (technical skills), and in terms of the ability of employment (employability skills) (Sunardi, & Sutadji; 2016). On the other hand, employability skills are one of the main skills that become the main consideration of indicators by business owners and company leaders in receiving employees (Buchori, 2015). Employability skills are mainly important because job demand in modern era demands initiative, flexibility, and a person's ability to handle a variety of tasks (Sunardi, & Sutadji; 2016). Therefore, students need to be supported with a set of skills to achieve success in the professional world (Hermana & Muhafiddin; 2009). Employability skills are those skills that are desired by the industrialized world of the prospective workers (The ESECT (Enhancing Student Employability Co-ordination Team, 2006). The result of such research shows that there are nine types of employability skills that are particularly needed by the industrialized world. The following lists in sequence starting from the highest to the lowest are, teamwork, problem solving skills, planning skills, emotional labour, Literacy skills, influencing skills, physical skills, Leadership skills, numeracy skills. According to the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI)

and the Business Council of Australia (BCA), employability skills are required not only the skills to get a job, but also to progress within the company so that it can reach someone's potential and contribute successfully on the strategic direction of the company. From some of the above explanations, it can be concluded that the employability skills are nontechnical basic skills needed by every individual who wish to enter into job entry. These skills become very important because it can support a person's career development activities and in the workplace, not only benefits to the success personally, but these skills can impact for the working environment (companies, offices, establishments) since the employees own these skills.

Concept of Guidance and Counselling

The concept guidance and counselling could mean different things to different people depending on the context in which they are used. For instance guidance in everyday language always mean some form of help giving to an individual or group of group of individuals in areas like personal, social (given information, direction and advice), educational and vocational (Sambo, 2009). There is much overlap among various definitions but a substantial agreement is evident that guidance is a process of helping an individual to understand himself and his world. Literarily the word guidance drive its root from the word 'guide' which means direct, watch over, know, pilot, manage, steer, aid, lead and inform (Oladele, 2007). As a concept, guidance and counselling express the utilization of a point of view in order to help individuals understand themselves and as a service it refers to the procedure and process organized to achieve a helping relationship (Sambo, 2009).

Aims of Guidance and Counselling

According to Ramakrishna and Jalajakumari (2013) guidance and counselling aim at orienting individuals to face the ever-changing challenges in today's fast- moving technological world. The guidance counsellor has to visualize the needs of future generations in facing these unknown realities and suggest ways and methods of developing built-in resources for this purpose. The world of work is changing fast and much more research is required to help the traditional worker to switch over to new technological gadgets and learn to be independent of others. Agrawal (2006) argued that guidance and counselling is needed wherever there are problems. He added that the aim of guidance and counselling involves; self-understanding and self-direction, helps in understanding one's strength, limitations and other resources. Guidance and counselling is helpful not only for students and teachers in an educational institution but also to the parents, administrators, planners and the community as a whole. Egbochuku (2008), added that the aim of counselling are broad and may depend on the situation, environment and training. Of which she include, altering maladjusted behaviour, assisting students to move in the direction of fulfilling their potentials among others. Basically, guidance and counselling aims to promote individual's wellbeing and thus promotes human development.

Guidance and Counselling as a panacea for Youth Employability in a global competitive Economy

The psychological effects of unemployment on graduate youths both in rural and urban settlements has been unravelled as many studies have shown that many unemployed youths

feel marginalized, pessimistic and lacking in control over their lives as Paul and Moser (2009) affirmed that youths who are unemployed showed more distress than employed youths. Compared to the employed, unemployed youths had poorer subjective well-being, lower self-esteem and higher levels of depression, distress, anxiety and psychosomatic symptoms. The authors contend that the adverse impact of unemployment on mental health was greater in countries with weak unemployment protection systems, weak economic development and unequal income distributions. Perhaps the assertion above explained why Reine (2013) maintained that long term youths unemployment have various health implications on men and women. In his study, Reine (2013) observed a significant association between unemployment and suboptimal self-rated health among women and unemployment and high alcohol consumption among men. Similarly, Breslin and Mustard (2013) revealed in their study that unemployment predicted a higher chance of mental distress for older adults within the ages of 31-55, but less likelihood for younger adults within the ages of 18-30. Whereas, Phan (2012) reported that the unemployed had poorer perceived mental health profiles and poorer access to health care services than the employed with the duration of unemployment very significant in predicting the severity of health outcomes. This showed that unemployment causes psychological problem for both adults and young people who are unemployed for long term.

In explaining psychological impact of unemployment on the youths using helplessness and hopelessness theory of depression, Abramson (1978) argued that affective, motivational and cognitive deficits in youths due to exposure to uncontrollable negative events causes upsurge of psychological depression. That is, a pessimistic attribution occurs when one attributes negative events to internal, stable and global causes, which subsequently results in a helpless reaction such as anxiety, hostility, passivity, sadness and low self-esteem (Peterson & Seligman, 2014). For Nyarko and Amissah (2014), unemployment leads to negative cognitive styles which have been found to be responsible for depression. Thus, psychological depression occurs when maladaptive cognitive styles become susceptible to depression following adverse unemployment impact. Employment or career counselling is the provision of accurate and usable facts concerning careers that state the entrance and training requirements, employment opportunities, nature and conditions of work, advancement opportunities, salary and benefits, trends and outlook to the unemployed members of the society. That is, the traditional approach to career counseling focused on information dispensing from the career counsellor to the client, with little attention given to the large number of influences impacting the individual's career engagement (Patton, 2015). However, in today's society unemployed youths want to be collaboratively guided through the process of interpreting the information that they have gathered about themselves and possible career choices through various career counselling techniques. In other words, contemporary career counselling is narrative counselling, which differs from traditional approach to career counselling in that it stems from the notion that individuals live their lives according to the stories that they tell themselves and that are told about them (Maree, Ebersohn, & Molepo, 2016).

Then the narrative counselling helps unemployed youths to take ownership of their career choices and ambitions by learning the skills needed to narrate a plausible and coherent story

of their life and see it through to completion. Hence, narrative counseling helps adolescents to identify themes and tensions in the story line in order to add meaning to their career narrative. That is, narrative counselling does not seek to simply understand the events in individual's stories, but rather to ascertain how these stories are impacting the individual. Thus, narrative counseling is the informational aspects of the youths and the job market, and the positioning of them within the story which provides its uniqueness for individual youths. At this juncture, it must be emphasized that career counselling is a *sine qua non* for gainful youths' employment. Whiston, Brecheisen and Stephens (2013) argued that career interventions that do not involve counselling, but rather focus on simply acquiring greater knowledge of career choices or computer-based tests are not as effective as career interventions that incorporate counselling. In fact, career intervention that does not involve career counselling especially in the area of career choice and skills remains ineffective. In support of this, Patton (2015) revealed that career counselling was most effective when it contained individualized interpretation and feedback; information about relevant occupations; opportunities for necessary behaviours to be modelled; helping clients make realistic career choices in light of their social network; and written homework exercises. Thus, there is positive and significant impact of effective counselling on employment of graduate youths, as being investigated by numerous scholars. For example, Taylor (2010) investigated the impact of career guidance counselling on the level of career indecision in the career decision-making process of late adolescents in Cape Town, South Africa. Three research questions and hypotheses guided the study and career decision-making difficulties questionnaire was used as instrument for the study. The respondents consisted experiment and control groups (N=33) and (N=50) respectively. Three distinct components of decision-making were assessed and revealed that career guidance counselling had the greatest impact in reducing adolescents level of career decision-making difficulties in the major category of lack of information. The study supported the notion that late adolescents who receive career guidance counselling are more likely to experience a reduction in their level of career indecision than adolescents who do not receive any form of career guidance counselling intervention. In the same vein, Oyinloye (2016) conducted a study on career guidance for youth empowerment and sustainable development in Ondo State, Nigeria. Two research questions and hypotheses guided the study. A sample of 203 respondents participated in the study and Students' Career Information Questionnaire was used for data collection with coefficient reliability of 0.86%. The data collected were analysed using frequency count, t-test and ANOVA and the study indicated that adolescents depend more on information from their peers in making career decision and that the adolescents career choice is motivated by prestige and monetary gain. It further showed that youths are guided on the right value system, choose career relevant to the societal needs and be encouraged to prepare for self-employment rather than embarking on search for unavailable job through guidance and counselling services.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made on the study:

1. Schools should regularly organise open door days and invite experts and professionals who have experiences in various careers to provide students with information on career choices and to also share their real life experiences so that students will be aware of what to expect from their own career choice.

2. Guidance counsellors and career experts should guide students in choosing a career, help them determine the most suitable careers based on their ability, aptitude, capability, and interest. Equally, teachers should work hand in hand with school counsellors by making referrals with antisocial behaviour to the counsellors for proper diagnosis and counselling.
3. Education stakeholders should ensure that schools are well equipped with adequate career resources and qualified personnel in order to provide students with the necessary services in terms of career guidance that will help them in making informed career decisions. Policy makers should implement career guidance in the curriculum of secondary schools to help the students understand what they want and how to go about it as respect to their future career choices.
4. Follow-up study is suggested to include among others an extensive data to promote employability of graduates.
5. To make the career guidance programme responsive to the needs of the youth in educational, academic, social and economic domains.

Conclusion

Youths are the most important segment of any human society as they are the reservoir of energy and agent of social change in the society. If they are correctly guided, mobilized and fully integrated in the fabrics of the nation's, that country can achieve high level of development. Youth are vital source of man power and do possess leadership potential, can acquire knowledge and are full of future promises. The youths therefore need to be empowered morally, economically, socially, politically and academically in order to attain educational development in a global competitive economy, this can only be achieved through proper guidance and counselling .

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