

## The Role of School Counselor at Primary School in Libya

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**Abstract:** The role of counselors in the schools is to improve students' behavior and to enhance and to enhance their achievements to become useful, productive and adjusted people in their community. In general, the educational process and the culture of the people in Libya do not emphasis the role of counselors. There is also a lack of understanding among the administrators, teachers and family members toward the functions of the counselors. The aim of this research is to explore the functions of primary school counselors in Libya. Particularly, to know what the primary school counselors do in schools and what challenges they faced when they do their duties. This paper discusses the role and functions of the primary school counselors, and how they deal with the problems of the students in the school.

### Introduction

**Counseling** in Arab countries is slow in progress. Libya is one of these countries that started with a few counseling programmed within the primary schools, since 1989. Counseling is defined as a range of procedure including sharing of feelings, support in times of need, encouragement, information giving, and personality tests interpretation. It is a dialogue between someone with a problem and another person with specialized knowledge and training who can help in the understanding and finding of solution to the problem.<sup>(1)</sup> Bor et.al. stated that school counseling is an interaction in a therapeutic setting, focusing primarily on a conversation about relationships, beliefs, feeling and behavior, through which the child's perceived problem is elucidated and framed.<sup>(2)</sup> In Libya the functions of counselor include the provision of educational services that integrate all aspects of student's academics such as identification, intervention, and social needs in learning. The counselor also aims to promote academic achievement and ease

educational processes through advising the students especially those with special needs.<sup>(3)</sup>

Counseling is a vital aspect of higher services at schools. It has been observed that counseling involves sequential actions and practices progressing toward a goal. It involves influencing voluntary behavior change on the part of the client. Shertzer and Stones (1963) defined counseling that is an interaction process which facilitates meaningful understanding of self, environment and values for future behavior.<sup>(4)</sup>

Counselors are the specialists in the development of human behavior and relationships. They provide help to students within four primary interventions: counseling, large group guidance, consultation, and coordination. In the last few years, Libya has an increasing number of counselors working in the primary schools. However, the duties have been poorly defined and greatly misunderstood by many educationists and even by the counselors themselves. Counseling definitions vary from counselor to counselor. It has been stated that the role of the primary school counselor is vague.<sup>(5)</sup> A role should not be confused with a function. A function refers to the duties and responsibilities assigned to a role. Therefore, Libyan counselors, have to clearly describe their duties and responsibilities.

A look at the Libya educational sector today reveals there is a need of primary school counselors to provide developmental assistance to the students.

### **The Functions of School Counselor as Presented by the Ministry of Education**

Guidance and counseling programmes officially began in the primary schools in Libya when the Ministry of Education initiated the program in 1989.<sup>(6)</sup> At that time, the Ministry of Education in Libya adopted the General Directorate of Guidance and Counseling to deal with psychological, social, educational, and vocational problems of the students.<sup>(7)</sup> It should be acknowledged that the general directorate of the counseling and guidance curriculum in Libya was

derived from western sources, mainly from England. In Libyan schools, they are called social counselor. In Libya, few Libyan children attend preprimary schools. In 1997, only 5 % of primary school aged children actually attended such schools in Libya, and most of these were foreigners. Libyans usually begin school when they are six years old. In 1989, there were 852,593 students in 31,296 classrooms for an average of 27.2 students per class. School years begin in September and last 280 days, with students attending classes 6 days per week. As of 1992, 92 % of eligible children were enrolled in primary schools, and approximately 48 % were female students. By 1994 this number increased to over 1.3 million students, of whom 49 % were female. This means that 97 % of eligible students were enrolled in primary schools. In 2006-2007, it was reported that Libya has primary school, 1,043,653 students and around 3700 social counselors. It was reported that 12 % of the schools had social counselors.

The school principal or vice principal headed 88 % of the social counselors.<sup>(8)</sup>

Counselors have direct contact with principal, teachers, and students to help students who have behavior problem. Counseling service is restricted to the one-to-one or group counseling provided for students to discuss the problem. Counseling is thus accepted as a unique experience shared by the counselor and the client in mutual trust and cordial relationship, respect for human development which is nurtured to achieve democratic leadership in the primary schools.<sup>(9)</sup>

In the primary schools, personal interview, test interpretation, counseling relationship and keeping of personal records are in place to help the students. Counseling may be forced on a person (students or teachers), but it should involve mutual consent. According to Libyan School Counselors Association, the main goal of a school counseling program is to enhance student's learning through student development and providing group guidance experiences to students through assembly talk and clubs. A student development comprised of three areas such as consultation, guidance, and teaching that encompass a variety of student learning competencies.<sup>(10)</sup>

## Guidance and Counseling Services in Libya Primary Schools

The school counselor has the following functions.

- 1) Counseling and advising children, teachers and parents;
- 2) Consult teachers with regard to the children's personal problems (for example, learning disability, short attention span) and curriculum development;
- 3) Consult with parents when a child has manifested a problem;
- 4) Consult group or individual base on issues related to academic disability or social adjustment in the class or school, or any other problems;
- 5) Co-ordinate case – conference with teachers and liaison with staff or outside agencies in the solution of problems; and
- 6) Provide remedial services in specific school subject where students are performing poorly.<sup>(11)</sup>

### The Challenges of Counselor in Primary Schools in Libya

The importance of guidance and counseling to the total educational effort is frequently misunderstood in the primary school. This misunderstanding has resulted in the lack of support to develop the school counseling services at this level. In spite of the strong support provided by the federal government, the provision of guidance and counseling services has not been accomplished at this level. Basically, these services have not been provided and extensively because school patrons, administrators and many teachers were not convinced that these services are needed or necessary in the primary school setting.<sup>(12)</sup> Thus, early report in Libyan primary schools suggested there are conflict between a true counselor's functions with the definition of the functions of the school counselor.<sup>(13)</sup> The ambiguity about the counselors' functions and expectations created confusion among teachers, administrative, parents, and students.

#### *Teachers*

Teachers are wary of counselors observing students in their classrooms. They worry that their teaching methods are being evaluated as if the counselors work as the eyes and ears of the administration. According to Myrick, some teachers hold misconceptions about the role and function of counselors.

Counselors are sometimes seen as administrative assistants. Teachers who are uncooperative and unsupportive often criticized the guidance and counseling work in general.<sup>(14)</sup> These teachers believe that counselors have little, if any, impact on students' behaviors or students performance. They do not support the students who work with the counselors. They may even refuse to send their students to the guidance office.<sup>(15)</sup>

Counselors depend on the teachers for support and interaction. When teachers have varying expectations of the function of counselors and the expectations are unclear, the teacher-counselor relationship is sure to suffer. The result is that the guidance and counseling service that a rendered become ineffective.<sup>(16)</sup>

### **Administration**

In primary schools, the administrators want to gain the control of the school counselor's time and duties, and when school counselors fail to define their own function and standards, the school administrators will direct counselors to do what they want the counselors to be. According to their objectives. A review by Al-Gamdi indicates that the role of the school counselor reflects a history of unclear definition and confusion.

As society changes and education reformed, profession administrators are left confused as to the purpose of guidance and counseling.<sup>(17)</sup>

Counselors who are doing a professional job often voiced that the administrators and school staff hold different views of how that guidance and counseling service should be. For instance, administrators and teachers sometimes expect counselors to deal with difficult discipline cases. The expectation is for the counselor to cure the student's riotous behaviors so as not to burden the teacher or principal.<sup>(18)</sup> They view the counselors as junior members of the administrative team. Some expect counselors to perform bus duty, teach classes, schedule classes, or monitor lunchroom or hallway behavior.<sup>(19)</sup> Moreover, counselors found themselves overly involved in paperwork, administrative tasks such as prepare checklist on absent students or taken over the punishment job to deal with students who disobey the school rules. Furthermore,

administrators expect the counselor to perform administrative duties instead of being responsible on the counseling process in school.<sup>(20)</sup> Counselors in Libya usually complain about the lack of support and cooperation from the administration. For instance schools do not include any information in the school board about the role of counseling to deal with school problems.

### **The Problem of Primary School Students in Libya**

Student at the primary school level are the most vulnerable set of learners in all the three tiers of education in any country of the world.<sup>(21)</sup> A quick look at the general objectives of primary education in Libya indicates that the child must be thoroughly supervised and counseled so that the objectives can be achieved. In the primary schools today, with the lack of the guidance and counseling support, children show various behavior problems. The result of this confusion can be a serious problem to the society as a whole and spell doom to the success of universal basic education.<sup>(22)</sup>

In the primary schools, students displayed crucial problems such as truancy, stealing, lying, bullying, stubbornness, fighting, noise making, cheating, unhealthy heterosexual relationships and a host of others.<sup>(23)</sup>

Other problems that may be manifested as the children enter adolescence period are dropping out of school, alcohol and drug abuse, and sexual misbehavior.<sup>(24)</sup> Other problems range from various disruptive classroom behaviors to revenge directed behaviors as stealing and destruction of property. The child also present problems that show disrespect like using abusive language, threatening the teacher, and failing to comply with the teacher's instruction. Students at primary schools, also present learning problems such as lack of skills, poor study habits, low motivation, and underachievement.<sup>(25)</sup>

The preventive function of the counselor aims to prevent the occurrence of these problems. Preventive functions include introducing children to healthy study habits and effective reading habits. It also includes Personal-social guidance to develop positive self-concept and promote interpersonal relationship among children from different background.<sup>(26)</sup>

All these factors and observation indicate the urgent and pressing needs of guidance and counseling service within the primary school sitting.

### **Recommendations:**

The authors proposed the following:

- 1) The school should be aware of the areas of special concern and needs of the students, so that the counselor can help these students.
- 2) The guidance and counseling services need to focus on four main areas: academic (choosing subject; study skills; and placement), career (education and development of career), psychosocial, and mental health.
- 3) The role and functions of counselor should be clearly defined to help the counselors, understand their duties and responsibilities. This would help to eliminate the confusion of the counselor's functions in the primary school.
- 4) The guidance and counseling services should do the following:
  - (a) Perform individuals and group guidance and counseling.
  - (b) Work with students with social behavior problems.
  - (c) Conducting workshop for teachers to help them understand the role and the functions of school counselor.
- 5) A Guidance and Counseling Committee need to be set up to monitor the guidance and counseling services in the primary schools.
- 6) All the counselors in the primary schools should be given in-service training to expose them to the skills of counseling.
- 7) The Government should promote counseling for students in Libyan primary schools. It is prudent to embark on counseling right from the early school years. It is more

helpful to lay a solid and positive social, academic and behavioral foundation at the primary school level than to defer it until the junior or senior secondary stage.

### Conclusion:

The role and functions of the primary school counselors must to be making known to everyone in the school. This will enable the counselor to obtain appropriate assistance and collaborating from everyone in the schools. School counseling can help maintain healthy development of the nation's students. The success of it depends entirely on the provision of qualified full-time counselors in the schools. There is certainly a need for professional training for school counselors.

School counselor training programmes at the teacher training colleges and universities should adopt the scientist-practitioner paradigm, and review the curriculum to conform to the requirement of professional training.

The role and functions of the primary school counselors need to be redefined in Libya. Integrating these elements into current policy for school counseling may enhance the effectiveness of school counseling in Libya.

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