# The role of counselling in developing countries: A reply to Soliman

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**Abstract.** Counselling, and in particular school counselling, is evolving very slowly in developing countries because of failure to place it in the mainstream of the school curriculum. If counselling is to perform any role in the social and economic development of these nations it must be able to influence the goals and priorities of schooling as well as suggest new methods of teaching. In this way, counselling would lead to adoption of school curriculum promoting not only intellectual development but also personal and psychological development. By so doing all the perceived "obstacles" to counselling's growth would disappear.

In an article in the International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling Soliman (1991) lamented the slow pace of growth of counselling in developing countries. Although the article provides a lot of food for thought it does not go far enough. Soliman gave a historical account of the development of the school counselling programme in Egypt before going on to present a catalogue of factors inhibiting growth of counselling in developing countries. At the close of the article he suggested some directions or techniques and settings for counselling through which it was hoped the growth of counselling in developing countries would be enhanced.

There is no doubt that counselling is not progressing at the pace one would have expected in the developing countries. Although evidence from the literature seems to indicate its endorsement following the reforms in education in many of these developing countries, very little counselling, if any, is taking place in their schools. Soliman wrote from his experiences in the Arab countries. The situations in developing African countries like Nigeria, a former British colony, and Cote d'Ivoire, a former French colony, closely resemble those of Egypt as described by Soliman.

## The development of counselling in African countries

In Nigeria, what looked like a formalized school counselling programme

started in 1959 (Makinde, 1973), a year before the country attained independence. More than 30 years later the programme still remains in its gestation period. In the 1970s a number of Nigerian Universities started to train school counsellors, while in the same period a number of teachers were sponsored by various governments of the country to become trained as school counsellors and careers teachers in the United States of America, Canada and Britain (Bojuwoye, 1976). On their return to the country many of these personnel were immediately assigned administrative and teaching duties, while some did not even return to take up their previous positions in the schools. Rather, they sought and obtained jobs with more enhanced status than counselling. Thus the programme which started with a lot of enthusiasm gradually died down as attitudes toward it became lukewarm. While the government acknowledged the importance of school counselling no money was committed to its implementation in the schools. Up to about 5 years ago (and even now) no Nigerian secondary school had a guidance programme in place, except for a few model schools controlled by the federal government.

In the late 1980s, the federal government, determined to realize the total implementation of the reform in secondary education, which was to have begun in 1977 with the publication of the National Policy on Education, set up a national committee on guidance and counselling. The committee came up with guidelines on the training of careers masters and school counsellors locally in Nigerian universities. The government has also been encouraging teachers wishing to train as counsellors through the award of scholarships. All secondary schools of the nation have also been directed to employ full-time counsellors and that each state's Ministry of Education is required to have a unit that coordinates school counselling programmes.

Despite the federal government's focal and influential lobby supporting school counselling programmes in Nigeria there exists considerable confusion about the nature of the programme – especially in the schools. Many school authorities and teachers question the legitimacy of a full-time school counsellor who is seen as not having enough in his or her job descriptions to be freed of teaching duties. The confusion also arose because secondary schools in Nigeria are under the control of various state governments who are grappling with the difficulties of funding instructional staff for their ever growing secondary schools and are not seriously in the business of employing school personnel who would not be engaged in teaching (Bojuwoye, 1987). Moreover, except in a few secondary schools controlled by the federal government, counsellors and teachers have no clear-cut roles they are to perform in the school counselling programmes they are to implement. Each school is left to do what it sees fit. Thus, with the different attitudes to the deployment of school counsellors and the lack of understanding as to the

nature and mode of the delivery of their services, school counselling programmes in Nigeria can hardly be said to be in place.

The situation in Cote d'Ivoire is not better. According to Perrier (1986) the country had a national committee on school guidance and there is a special unit in its Ministry of Education charged with the responsibility to coordinate school guidance programmes in the nation. Before 1960, the year the country attained independent status, school guidance programmes were in the hands of the French nationals who were later replaced by Cote d'Ivoire nationals. In preparation for the take-over they underwent training at the Cote d'Ivoire Centre for Studies and Research in Applied Psychology (CEIRPA). The nature of the training (assumed to be crash programmes) was said not to have adequately prepared them for the roles they were to fulfil in the schools. Also, there were the questions of financial limitation and attitudes toward a school counselling programme that had not been presented as an integral part of the educational process as defined through the curriculum. Rather, and as in Nigeria and Egypt, school counselling was presented as an ancillary function subject to frequent discontinuation. Napier's (1972) observation many years ago that "the extent to which nations like Ghana, Gabon, the Ivory Coast, Dahomey, and Sierra Leone claimed to have programmes which are functional remained to be seen" (p. 22) is still largely true since many of these nations' school counselling programmes have become impoverished.

**Factors inhibiting the growth of school counselling in developing countries**

Soliman's presentation of the factors responsible for the slow pace of development of school counselling in developing countries, in the main, appears to be a gross misinterpretation of the situation. It is not sufficient to state that he omitted the most important factors, despite the fact that he was probably looking at the situation from the perspectives of his experiences in the rich Arab countries. I willingly admit to my own ignorance of parallel situations in the Arab countries and to state here too that I am writing from the perspective of my understanding of and experiences with African countries. It is therefore interesting that whenever there is a discussion on developing countries it is more likely that African countries are the focus, even though southeast Asian and Arab countries share similar characteristics. Whatever is made of that by any reader, as far as African countries are concerned there are three major factors that I believe rank highest among those inhibiting the growth of school counselling programmes. These are finance, attitudes and the fact that school counselling is not given a proper place in the school curriculum.

There is probably not going to be much disagreement with the statement that one major factor used to classify whether countries are developed or underdeveloped (or to use Soliman's term "developing") is economic. This probably is the most potent factor militating against school counselling programmes in developing countries. Some of Soliman's other factors may contribute but not as significantly as this one. Financial limitation, of course, is largely responsible for the other two factors, directly or indirectly.

In the 1970s many African countries embarked on expanded education programmes to eradicate illiteracy and to promote political socialization and economic development. Since then many of these countries have been spending well over 30% of their annual budgets on education. For example, Burkina Faso spends about 30% of its budget on education and nearly 18% on debt servicing (The Courier, March–April 1991, p. 14). Due to the high cost of education many African countries are still finding it extremely difficult to get their young citizens into schools, to provide enough classroom spaces for the ones seeking admission, to train enough teachers and to provide instructional resource materials (especially textbooks). To many African governments these are more central concerns and usually become a higher priority than the luxury of personal counselling, which many misconstrue school counselling to mean. With such misconception, it is highly unlikely that any nation would be ready to commit huge financial resources to a school programme seen as nonconsequential. Moreover, apart from education, other social services, in particular, health care delivery services, continue to make demands on the dwindling economies of these nations. A school counselling programme, if it is to be implemented properly, needs a lot of money. If education already is consuming so much money, expending more to implement a school counselling programme may mean crippling of the other social services. Therefore, it may be said that the high cost of education is an inhibiting factor to the growth of school counselling in developing countries.

Finance, on the other hand, though very crucial for school counselling development, probably is not as influential as the unfavourable attitudes toward these programmes. Again, this is largely the result of misconception of their nature. This lack of understanding is responsible for the various ways the programme is described or perceived. With favourable attitudes the effect of limited finances could have been minimized as there would have been efforts to utilize the limited resources to the best advantage. Poor attitudes, however, distort the image of the nature of an otherwise very excellent programme. First, the image of the school counselling programme is blurred partly because of nomenclature. Some refer to it as the "School Guidance Programme", some call it the "Guidance and Counselling Programme", some simply call it "Counselling". This, in many ways, has an effect on

programme emphasis as some governments, for reasons best known to them, want vocational guidance emphasized, school authorities want educational guidance, while school counsellors, because of the nature of their training, want personal counselling emphasized. I would like to think that these designations are not worrisome, what matters, of course, is the definition and what it is we want the programme to do for us. However, this confusion as to the nature of the programme is responsible, in part, for not knowing what place it should occupy in the general programme of the school (curricular and cocurricular).

In the three countries described, governments acknowledge the importance of the school counselling programme in the education of the youth, but are not in the mood to commit money to its implementation. Thus at this level only lip service is paid to the programme. Perhaps the most damaging attitudes toward school counselling programmes are those expressed at the school level by the administrators and the teachers. These school personnel are of the view that counselling is nothing new and that it has been part of their duties to provide support and guidance to pupils. As a result, they see no need for specially trained personnel to carry out duties they have been performing.

The school counsellors themselves also helped the teachers and school administrators develop hostility to the school counselling programme. The counsellors were formerly teachers, many of whom trained as counsellors with the belief that the new job roles would take them out of the classroom. The image of the classroom teacher is not one which is enviable in many of these developing countries largely due to poor salary.

On assuming their new duties the school counsellors often tend to want to isolate themselves from the normal flow of school life, expressing an air of importance and a feeling that they occupy a higher status than the teachers. Another area of teacher's antipathy for school counselling is the fact that there could be someone in the school with vital information about pupils which may not be divulged to even the school head. Then of course there is the issue that counselling may result in pupils becoming more assertive rather than conforming – a situation which teachers and administrators often see as undermining their authority. All these add up to make school administrators and teachers develop strong opposition to counselling. Many even consider it a hindrance to the proper aim of school, especially those who belong to the traditional authoritarian way of bringing up children. Both teachers and administrators, therefore, do all in their power to undermine the efforts of the school counsellors and school counselling and in many cases consciously work to ensure that the programme is killed.

Another aspect of counselling which causes many people to have unfavourable attitudes towards it is lack of evidence that it (personal counselling)

changes behaviour. Soliman would probably want to suggest that this is not the case, that it is because counselling is foreign to people in developing countries. Again, from my own experience I think it is because a school counselling programme is construed to be purely personal counselling and that too much emphasis is placed on its delivery as a process of catharsis rather than a process of education. The fact that it is hard to prove that behaviour change results directly from personal counselling is barrier enough to stop any government which might otherwise be willing to provide funds. The fact is that a school counselling programme comprises much more than personal counselling. Rather, it is a programme of activities designed to promote the psychological maturity or total personality development of the pupils.

## School counselling and traditional cultural models

There is confusion in Soliman's article concerning the role of the family and the community or in general the traditional cultural value structure. When presenting his catalogue of barriers to counselling, traditional cultural value orientations (as portrayed by the family) top the list. The community and the family also top the list of settings being recommended for counselling practices in developing countries. The impression gained from the article, therefore, is as if culture is static and as if developing countries are as traditional as they were many years ago. Soliman, no doubt, agrees that societies are undergoing changes. This he acknowledges by his statement on the migration of rural Arabs to cities like Kuwait and "other Arab Gulf cities".

This movement, no doubt, negatively impacts the role of psychological support which the family was traditionally known to provide to its members. With migration and other social and economic changes societies in the developing countries are also experiencing breakdown in the religious, parental and tribal influences on the individuals. This, in some ways, is responsible for McWhirter's (1987) claim that traditional cultural models of decision making, career selection and human services delivery are being supplanted by counselling since the former are no longer effective in a world of rapid and uncomfortable social and economic changes brought about by industrialization, urbanization and democratization. Different countries, the world over, developed and underdeveloped (or developing), are now adopting counselling, an originally American phenomenon, to assist people to cope with the problems brought about by the social and economic changes in the modern world in which we live.

It is my belief that counselling has to replace the traditional cultural models because of the latter's ineffectiveness at resolving the kinds of

problems being experienced today. These problems are radically different in nature from the ones previously being experienced in the traditional settings. Therefore, Soliman's statement that "professional counsellors should make use of traditional methods and philosophy and integrate them with modern concepts and techniques of counselling" (p. 10) should be taken with caution. This is particularly true in the light of the fact that counselling is born out of an American tradition of democracy, freedom and individualism that is very much different from the traditional hierarchical and somewhat authoritarian societies to which many developing countries belong. Soliman also agrees with this view by stating that "the power structures in developing countries are mainly authoritarian or military...These power structures hardly permit the implementation of philosophy of counselling which is based on freedom of choice and functioning" (p. 6).

Ratovoson (1991), while writing on the cultural and religious life of Madagascar, observed that the traditional model of counselling in this country makes the individual psychologically and morally dependent on the traditional counsellors and "gods". He suggested the transformation of the hidebound cultural practices to modern but rational solutions. Soliman acknowledges this need to move away from negative cultural practices and, therefore, advises that "counsellors in developing countries should ensure the freedom of the clients" (p. 10). This, of course, contradicts his earlier suggestion that counsellors should use traditional models of counselling. Perhaps he means that counsellors in developing countries should take advantage of some cultural practices like teaching and operating in groups rather than being individualistic, since these are compatible with school counselling practices to be discussed later in this article. This also must be taken with caution in light of the fact that in school counselling pupils are assisted to think for themselves and to make independent decisions. However, employment of group practices can remove those problems of self-disclosure or masking of feelings that Soliman considered as factors inhibiting the growth of counselling in developing nations.

**School counselling and adolescents in developing countries**

Soliman's statement that counselling is usually first introduced into secondary school, in any country where it is tried, is one I think should have been explored further rather than suggesting the use of other settings for counselling in developing countries. The critical analysis of the rationale for this precedent would have provided the direction toward which counselling in developing countries could proceed if it is to attain sustained growth. Justifying this trend could have made some of his suggestions like "the

counsellor should predict and project problems that might occur in the future or go unnoticed at the present" (p. 11) more meaningful. This is because I believe that school counselling is about preparing adolescent pupils for their future adult and work roles.

School counselling has a predominantly future perspective. It is concerned with long-term decision making, progression and transition. Personal counselling, on the other hand, whilst it can have such a future perspective, is rather more likely to arise as a result of students needing to deal with immediate issues and problems. I am particularly convinced that it is through the success of school counselling programmes that counselling as a profession can be allowed to progress in developing countries. In no other settings, and contrary to what Soliman would have us believe, is counselling more urgently needed than in secondary schools of developing nations. This is because secondary schools contain adolescents who are particularly vulnerable to the problems of modern living, partly because they are undergoing baffling physical and emotional changes and partly because of their lack of experiences.

According to Hurrelmann (1990) adolescence is a stage in the life span characterized by more experimentation and exploration, risk taking and rebellion. Problems resulting from the social and economic changes being experienced in many of these developing countries today can provoke adolescents to respond with behaviours having catastrophic consequences. Urban shift or migration to urban centres, as described by Soliman, affect youth in developing countries more than other segments of the population because they are the ones moving from their rural homes to areas of industrial activity in search of work. Among the youth (especially teenagers) of developing countries today there is increasing alcohol consumption, drug abuse, a growing social acceptance of casual and unprotected sexual relations and loosening of traditional and religious norms governing premarital sex. There is also among these youth a very strong notion that marital relations are no longer long-term as was the case in the traditional settings. All these are responses to the problems brought about by economic and social changes they experience and for which, unfortunately, there are no community resources to help. This establishes the rationale for focusing on adolescence as the key stage in life for shaping the healthy personality necessary for ensuring effective adult life. This also is consistent with the goal of qualitative secondary education and indeed the goal of school counselling.

In most developing countries young people, especially teenagers (children under 15 and still in primary school and those of secondary school age), constitute a very significant segment of the population. For example, in Papua New Guinea, the proportion of the children under 15 years of age in

the population of that country is estimated to be 43% (Van Der Meijden & Malau, 1991). The figure is even higher in some African countries devastated by civil wars. It is in the schools of these nations that we can get or reach the largest concentration of these youth. Many writers quoted by Soliman suggested the family or the community as the settings for counselling or guidance in developing countries. They probably are not aware of the much earlier reports by United Nations (1962) which suggested more definitive guidance in secondary schools of developing nations particularly because "many families there are scarcely capable of reaching well informed decisions about the future of their children" (p. 39). This advice came about because of illiteracy among a large proportion of adults in developing countries, a situation that still prevails today. For example, Egypt, which by African standards may be regarded as advanced, is said to suffer from 50% illiteracy (The Economist, 25–30 May, 1991, p. 82).

A second reason for suggesting secondary school as the setting most appropriate for counselling is probably because of the awareness of the fact that many of the problems of modern living as highlighted above are not problems traditional cultural models of counselling can solve. I do not know whether traditional cultural models of counselling have solutions to problems of urban dwelling, unemployment, drug abuse and the like. These are not problems which have arisen from traditional ways of life. Since there are no community-based agencies equipped with counsellors, psychiatrists or psychologists to whom the youth can turn the school remains the only setting where youth can receive the help they need to achieve psychological maturity and individual development.

I have earlier stated that not putting a school counselling programme in proper perspective is a major obstacle to its growth in developing countries. By this I mean that because developing countries adopting counselling did not (and still do not) integrate counselling into the programme of each pupil as an integral part of the school curriculum with appropriate delivery models, these programmes are doomed to fail.

I have stated earlier that school counselling has been misconstrued to mean personal counselling. Many people get attracted to the "cure all" psychotherapeutic approach to counselling in school (Napier, 1972) or the counsellors therapeutic role of being client-centred and providing pupils with private, confidential, one-to-one experience (Sprinthall, 1980), and one with the goal of helping pupils to feel less inadequate, more self-actualizing, creative, self-reliant and spontaneous. No doubt, these are good end products but unfortunately there is very little evidence, if any, that such limited relationships as in personal counselling do result in achieving the personal growth goals or the kind of psychological maturity described above as goals of counselling. This is particularly true in schools with counsellor/student

ratios offering a student opportunities to see a counsellor probably for just 10 minutes in his or her entire school life.

School counselling programmes are made up of activities or services which are focused on how pupils make decisions, their levels of value and attitude development, their self-concepts and their intrinsic interest in learning. This kind of programme of activities designed to bring about psychological maturity is not one which could take place in a limited amount of time as available to pupils for personal counselling. Thus, as stated earlier, school counselling is a long-term process. Moreover, adopting a therapeutic approach to school counselling would tend to separate the psychology of the pupil from the psychology of the school and would keep the pupil's mind in the classroom while the soul is kept in the counselling office (Sprinthall, 1980). This is similar to what Napier (1972) described as happened in Ghana when that country evolved a policy to separate vocational guidance from the school by establishing occupational bureaus throughout the nation.

What this can be translated to mean is that since the central focus of school counselling is the promotion of psychological maturity or the total development of a healthy personality in every pupil, it is a process which is gradual and proceeds over a long period of time rather than one that takes place in a short period. The future perspective, as stated earlier, is the defining characteristic of a school counselling programme. The objective is to provide forward looking assistance of a guidance nature throughout the pupils programmes of learning. The concern is both with finding immediate solutions to problems and long-term life planning. That is, school counselling prepares pupils to cope with current and future situations and problems. Secondary schools are set up to prepare adolescents for future life roles as adults. Therefore, to separate school counselling programme from the general school curriculum is to give the impression that school counselling programmes have goals that are different from the school curricular or educational goals. This, of course, is far from the truth. What Soliman described as the goals of school counselling programme, that is, "to help students choose appropriate educational programmes", "to distribute students into appropriate educational programmes", "to help students acquire information, attitudes, and skills" (pp. 9 & 12), are not the real ends of school counselling programme. Rather, they are means to an end – the end being psychological maturity or total personality development (or what some described in the literature as "happiness" or "feeling of a sense of self-fulfillment").

**New direction for school counselling in developing countries**

Unfortunately, many people regard the curriculum of the school as the

subjects taught to the students so that they can pass examinations. As such the successful learning by the students is seen in terms of the marks obtained in these examinations. In other words, the tendency for many people is to define educational goals of the school in terms of marks obtained in examinations and hence in terms of academic achievement. This is particularly true in many developing countries where mass education is emphasized and going to school to obtain certificates or diplomas is what many consider as the goal of education. Sprinthall (1980), however, points out that academic achievement does not relate to success as an adult and that there is zero relationship between the life skills of a successful adult and his or her grade-point average or the marks obtained in examination.

McClelland (1973) after a review of studies examining actual on-the-job performance of adults came to the conclusion that psychological variables such as personal competence or psychological maturity were factors in success as an adult, not grade-point average or academic achievement. If this is the case, we need to rethink the priorities of secondary school education. We need to consciously promote not just cognitive development as we have been doing by teaching the subject matter of the curriculum, but also other aspects of development – personal and psychological. This of course means that just as we give status to teaching of subject matter in order to promote academic achievement, we must also give equal, if not higher, status to aspects which promote personal and psychological development of pupils. That is, we must emphasize the real goal of secondary school education – the psychological domains of self-development, ego maturity, competence, efficacy, moral development and interpersonal conceptual growth (Sprinthall, 1980).

We must make the school curriculum one that promotes the development of human and humane pupils, not as subject matter taught to the students in order to pass examinations. Furthermore, the curriculum which promotes the psychological development of pupils cannot be a hidden agenda or one that is neatly tucked away within the subjects. To do so is to give the impression that it is nonconsequential, something to be dealt with in a fragmented manner or not dealt with at all. School counselling programmes must, therefore, have identifiable places in the general programme of the school.

MacMullen (1977) believes that school counselling programmes should be given status equal to a main subject departments like mathematics, if it is to play an effective role in the secondary school education. How school counselling programmes are presented is relevant to the perception of its importance by both the pupils, teachers, guidance workers, parents and the community in general. If properly integrated in the curriculum and given status confidence in it, as a viable programme capable of promoting the overall development of the pupils and as a programme which can contribute significantly to the social and economic growth of the society, will grow.

Setting new goals and new curricular content for school cannot be teacher proof. All who are responsible for the framing and delivery of school curriculum have counselling roles to fulfill since school counselling is not the exclusive preserve of the school counsellors. On the contrary, although counsellors have specific roles to fulfill in the programme, other school staff also have roles to play. One very important contribution of the effort to place school counselling within the mainstream of the school curriculum is the serious restructure of teacher-pupil relationships (Sprinthall, 1980). Thus the creation of positive, sensitive interaction between teachers and pupils, including the use of small groups, pupils as resources, and open-ended discussion as well as alerting counsellors to minor problems of the pupils as they arise, these are the roles teachers are expected to play in the school counselling programme. To improve teaching strategies and interactional patterns in the classrooms teachers would need to be trained in counselling and communication skills. Through appropriate implementation of school counselling programmes in this manner teachers and counsellors would come to see themselves as colleagues employing similar strategies that respond appropriately to pupils' thoughts and feelings.

In conclusion, I would like to submit that school counselling has a chance to grow in developing countries when not seen as a stereotypic process separated from the school curriculum. Schools in developing countries, like those in developed countries, must begin to adopt curriculum materials designed to promote not only intellectual development but also the psychological growth of the pupils. School counselling programmes need to be seen as an educational process because pupils can be guaranteed experiences of significant and comprehensive education in their classrooms. It is this kind of educational process which combines and synthesizes all aspects, contents and process, ideas and feelings, cognition and emotion, self and interpersonal growth that will ensure the psychological maturity of pupils.

Although the secondary school is being presented here as the most appropriate setting for counselling in developing countries, this nevertheless does not suggest that counselling in primary schools should not be given consideration. If, as suggested earlier, the main concern of school counselling is preparing adolescents for adult and working life, these adolescents are not only those in secondary schools but also those in primary schools as well. In particular, there are adolescents in the upper class levels of primary schools who experience problems similar to those of adolescents in secondary schools and they too need counselling assistance in resolving these problems. It is even more ideal to start school counselling right from primary school if it is agreed that one of the goals of education is to prepare adolescents for adult work roles. Career development is a continuous process commencing early in life. When school counselling which incorporates

careers education starts early in school life, it enables students to start thinking about their future job roles from early age. With an early start they can benefit from many resources which may not be available to them if they were to start later in life.

Primary school education does not prepare its recipients for any specific work roles. In developing countries transition from primary to secondary school by pupils is not 100%. This means that many pupils terminate their formal education at the end of primary school. For this group of pupils there would be need for assistance of counselling nature to help them prepare for the life they would live at the end of their formal education. Among other needs for starting school counselling at the primary school level are: to help children make a smooth transition from home to school (the first of such transition and probably the most difficult), to help children solve problems as they arise and before becoming too difficult to solve later in life and to assist children as they begin to form habits and develop self-concepts.

Therefore, my own view is that developing countries should not only integrate counselling into the curriculum of secondary schools but also ensure that counselling features very prominently in the primary schools of the nations. This way they would realize to the maximum the educational objective of total personality development of their young citizens.

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