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Challenges Faced by Counsellors in Inclusive Education

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Abstract

Counselling is an important aspect not only in the regular classroom structure but has its significance in Inclusive Education. An inclusive and a diverse environment can drastically improve the wellbeing of students. Traditional methods deal with students of learning difficulties or disabilities by separating them into small groups and teaching them away from their main classmates. This would definitely create an idea that they are different and lower their confidence. Inclusive education gives an opportunity to these students by allowing them to mingle and be part of the mainstream classroom. This paper throws light on the significance of counselling in Inclusive Education, Problems faced by a counsellor in schools, intervention programmes for students with special needs and the challenges the school counsellor might face in future.

Keywords: Counselling, Schools and Strategies.

Introduction

Counselling and Guidance is a significant tool in changing the negative ideology that is implanted by his/her peers. There is an exceptionally great need for the school counsellor to shape and assist the child in shaping their future. School counsellors are required to exhibit cordial demeanour, attentively attend to students' concerns, and provide suitable guidance in order to shape their development and ensure they select the correct course of action. This paper throws light on the significance of Counselling in Inclusive Education

Egbo (2013) stated that “The total development of a child can only take place in an environment conducive for teaching and learning.” It is believed that school counselling will develop and assess educational programmes. Although it does not fall under the category of psychiatric or medical, it is occasionally employed as a form of therapy for individuals dealing with specific personal issues or in a broader sense, as in the case of a “Life Skills Training Programme” for students.

An inclusive and a diverse environment can drastically improve the wellbeing of students. Traditional methods deal with students of learning difficulties or disabilities by separating them into small groups and teaching them away from their main classmates. This would definitely create an idea that they are different and lower their confidence. Inclusive education gives an opportunity to these students by allowing them to mingle and be part of the mainstream

classroom. The students would feel a sense of belonging and they would actively take part in the classroom interactions.

However, therapists face a number of difficulties, such as being overly judgmental of their clients and having uncomfortable reactions to them. The majority of students and educators view counselling as a relatively brief process, and school counsellors confront significant challenges in persuading family members because therapy is still frowned upon in many communities.

Significance of Counselling in Inclusive Education

Promoting the growth and self-awareness of inclusive students is a crucial responsibility of a school counsellor, benefiting both the teachers and the students. According to Makinde (1984), school counsellors are concerned with helping pupils develop holistically. Bennars (1994) provides additional support for this assertion. According to Mutie and Ndambukie (2000) and Ndirangu (2007), inclusive interventions ought to incorporate skills that foster students' moral development, social intelligence, and intellectual capacity. Therefore, these interventions are focused on assisting students with special needs to balance their abilities, values and interests. This would enable them to develop in a holistic manner. Self-awareness helps the students to evaluate their goals and plans in a realistic manner.

Disabled children are often misread and often given importance by the counselling profession. All therapists have an ethical and a professional responsibility to promote conditions that help the students to achieve holistic development which also includes exceptional groups. Counselling and Psychotherapy can immensely with kids with Autism and ADHD (Attention-deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder). These students constantly need motivation which in turn boosts their self-confidence. School counsellors actively listen to the demands of the students. This will add a new perspective to the way these kids look at the world since they usually have their own issues against the society.

Children with Autism should be constantly encouraged that they're capable of doing great things and they can only accomplish them once they stop comparing themselves with other students in the class. The school counsellor understands the bottled-up feelings of these students. When these kids find a friend in the counsellor, they will start developing trust and start trusting their parents and their peers. Counselling children with ADHD helps them feel tremendously understood and heard. It will help them to perform better at School and Home as well. The school counsellor empathizes with the situation that the child is going through and will help them through development.

Therapy can help these students to learn active listening without getting distracted, shouting in inappropriate places and constantly fidgeting can be disturbing to their peers. Therapists would help them to control their impulses. The school counsellor psycho-educates the parents and the caregivers of the student with ADHD in understanding their condition. They would also be educated with useful aids to proffer the child's treatment.

Main Challenges Faced by the Counsellor in Schools

With regard to the problems faced by the school counsellors, there have been lots of studies which highlights the challenges faced by them in inclusive classroom.

A considerable number of school counsellors failed to receive adequate practical training during their postgraduate studies. Furthermore, their sufficient experience in various counselling contexts does not qualify them to manage an inclusive classroom. Particularly lacking in awareness is the principal, fellow educators, and members of the student families regarding counselling. The principal and instructors are not informed of the professional descriptions associated with the positions of clinical psychologist, psychiatrist, and counsellor. The term "Counselling" is not defined precisely within the school, and both instructors and pupils have varying interpretations of

its meaning. Instructors lack the capacity to comprehend the efficacy of therapeutic interventions for pupils. Others in the department fail to comprehend the importance of counselling within the context of an inclusive learning environment.

School counsellors also face a challenge wherein the psychiatrists are not referring the children for counselling who are going to them for medication. When hiring a school counsellor, appropriate job descriptions are not provided, and employers are unaware of a post-graduate programme in counselling psychology. This makes for a teacher to manage an inclusive classroom without the help of a school counsellor.

Overload of work causes Stress and Burnout to the school counsellors as there is no recruitment of enough school counsellors in the school. This would hinder the development and there will be scattered attention among the children with special needs. The children will not get enough focus and attention as there is a lack of school counsellors in the school. School counsellors report that they are not paid sufficient salary. Reports also convey that the school counsellors are not paid for their therapy sessions with the special needs children as their parents assume that therapy involves only listening and talking with the children. This would lead a lot of school counsellors to resign from their work and would lead to a counsellor in the school.

With regard to this, teachers think Counselling is a short-term process and do not send in the students with special needs for counselling as they assume that a lot of time is wasted. Again, this leads to a shortage of school counsellors as schools are hesitant to hire young counsellors because they believe they are not competent counsellors. School counsellors also do report that counselling in a regional language is much difficult to translate what was learned in English. This often hinders counsellors to create rapport and create behavioural interventions with students of special needs.

Additionally, school counsellors claim that in serious cases like suicide, they are unable to determine how much information to share with the family. They also do report that a lack of network/association of counsellors is making them to struggle to find a supervisor or a consultation regarding therapy for students with special needs.

Counselling Intervention Programmes for Students with Special Needs

Early Intervention is defined as working out plans as soon as possible to implement on the student's developmental, health and support needs. Early intervention is a variety of special and specific services to help children with special needs with developmental delays.

Early Intervention Programme Includes one or more of these Services

- Speech Therapy
- Screening and assessment
- Social work services
- Psychological services
- Home visits
- Physical/Occupational therapy
- Hearing or vision services

These services improve the children's developmental, social and educational domains. Counsellors use positive behaviour strategies and interventions to help improve and decrease behavioural issues.

Diverse child-focused strategies have shown success which includes interacting with classmates, modelling and sporadic reinforcement. These strategies should be implemented in a constant manner for the children to achieve their goals.

Characteristics of Standard Interventions

Family – Centered

- This Intervention includes the family to work along with the school counsellor and learn how the child can be helped.
- It is very flexible and can be offered in home, school and other intervention centres.
- It Psycho-educates the family with support and guidance

Appropriate for Development

- This is done by trained therapists who train children according to their specified needs.
- This intervention includes an individualised plan for the student and it is reviewed regularly.
- The school counsellor tracks the child's progress with consistent assessments.

Child-Focused

- The school counsellor makes the students to practise difficult skills and makes them to use in different settings.
- This intervention prepares and supports the students for holistic development.
- The school counsellor creates a support group for the student.

Supportive and Structured

- The school counsellor provides a learning environment where the students feel safe and supported.
- The intervention plan is well organised and regular.

These interventions consist of diverse services to improve skills, decrease developmental issues and deterioration and enhance the well-being of the students.

The Challenges School Counsellors might Face in the Future

School counsellors have to be prepared to handle a range of new issues as families become more complex and society get more varied. The following are some of the difficulties that school counsellors may encounter:

- **Issues of Racism and Social Biases:** School counsellors play a major role in fighting against Racism and inequality in the classroom. Counselling for students with special needs, observing their behaviour in the mainstream classroom and voicing out their opinions for eliminating the school policies that affect inclusive students and students of colour will be one of the foremost responsibilities for school counsellors.
- **Dealing with Post-Covid symptoms:** Since there will be budget cuts and economic downfall throughout the country, counsellors will not have the specified tools and the space to provide therapy for the inclusive students. As Brennan Bernard says, “As revenue dries up in many countries that fund their public schools through taxes, we need to find ways to support these schools amid budget cuts and protect the very individuals we will rely on to guide tomorrow's leaders and employees.”
- **Promoting Diversity and Inclusion:** Along with combating racism and social biases, school counsellors will be taxed with creating more inclusive classrooms in their schools. Building specific training schedules, Renewing the school curriculum, advocating for new policies which is supportive to the inclusive students will be the main components of this plan.

School counsellors are essential in helping students succeed by supporting their mental development, emotional well-being, and overall growth. Getting an advanced post-graduate degree in inclusive education is a crucial step towards developing one's skills as a future professional in this subject.

Recommendations

- Students with special needs should constantly visit the school counsellor for interventions.
- The school counsellor should see the student as a friend or someone who needs guidance/help as a medical doctor – patient relationship.
- Schools should also evaluate the school counsellor on the basis of the feedback from the students and their parents in order to encourage the counsellors to do their job better in guiding students.
- Attending professional conferences can help school counsellors improve their skills and get new insights on inclusive education.
- Fostering strong relationship with teachers, parents and the principal to build a collaborative support system would help the students in a significant manner.
- The school counsellors should advocate for inclusive policies and practices to build a supportive educational environment for the student.

Conclusion

The goal of inclusive education is to keep children out of activities that stunt their development and to help them develop their skills and talents in a way that will enable them to function in a regular classroom. It is imperative that the school counsellor fosters the student's confidence in the counselor's ability to support their personal development. This is the case because the pupils have confidence in the counsellor, which facilitates the therapeutic process.

Instead of following their peers or succumbing to peer pressure to choose a job path they are not interested in, counselling enables students to select a suitable professional route that they are competent at. In order for students to grow and develop in the complicated culture in which we currently live, their education requires ongoing guidance.

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