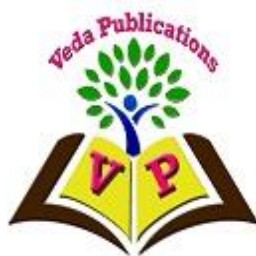**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

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PROFILING LEARNING ENVIRONMENT THREATS AND MANAGING SECURITY INFORMATION: THE EMERGING ROLES OF COUNSELLORS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

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The task of profiling learning environment threats and management of security information within school is highly imperative. This paper examined different forms of threats around school and the challenges they posed. Furthermore, the sources of security information were discussed so as to enhance better learning environment that could prevent students, staff from been exposed to kidnapping, banditry, frequent attacks, bombing and other threats. The paper identified the active roles of security agencies in prevention and response to school threats. Also, the roles of professional counsellors in the 21ˢᵗ century with respect to contending security issues associated with schools were discussed. The paper recommended that security counselling and prerequisite training of school counsellors will enhance counselling profession in the 21ˢᵗ century. Also, the creation of security council at every level to include professional counsellors that interact with the students, staff, community members on daily basis are resourceful and dependable in security cycle.

Introduction

Historically, school learning environment is full of so much fun and experiments that every child looks forward to. But the same environment is now becoming a conscious trending area that parents and guidance have to advise, monitored the movement of children in and out of school environment. Teaching staff always express pleasantries in the morning among themselves and students, but today, learning environment is thrown into caution, a place of fear and anxiety.

According to 2020 annual report of UNICEF, the year 2020 was a year like no other. The period was unproductive to schools, staff, students and the educational sectors as a whole. The report also stated that the year witnessed school closures, increased vulnerability to abuses, mental health and loss of access to vital services which of course has hurt children deeply. (https://www.unicef.org.report.2020). Presently, the school learning environment encountered the challenges and threats of public health crisis of COVID-19. UNICEF (2020) reported that about 6.7 million children are at risk of developing forms of acute malnutrition, 7.6 million girls are at risk of not returning to school due to COVID-19 (https://www.unicef.org).

The learning environment has been confronted with different degrees of problems ranging from a formulated public health crisis to insurgencies, kidnapping, banditry, cultism, ritual killing and so on. For the past two decades, the nation is contending with the challenges of insurgencies that is deeply rooted from Boko Haram. This development posed great danger to learning environment as both living and materials are not spared from its impacts. Schools have witnessed killings of students, staff and total destruction of structures. As reported by Human Right Watch (2012), a total of 935 persons have died from 164 attacks. To butress the

report by the Human Right Watch, Oluwaseun (2012) expressed that this development in the region has made school enrolment to reduced.

Education Plus Development (2021) report reviewed that the rate of mass kidnappings of school children represent the gravest threats and crisis to educational system. Within three months December 2020 to March 2021, more than 600 children have been kidnapped, while in school to mention just a few, and this constitute one of the threats in the school environment. In 2014 alone Boko-Haram abducted over 270 school girls from Government Girls College Chibok, gunmen kidnapped over 40 people and students in a school attack at Government Science College Kagara in Niger State. All these attacks and others constitute a great challenge to education. According to Oladejo (2019), many school children have suffered different degrees of deformity as a result of the attack by the insurgents. Over 2,295 teachers have been killed, while over 19,000 teachers have been displaced by the activities of insurgents. UNICEF report (2019) estimated that more than 1,400 schools have been destroyed, damaged or looted. According to the United Nations (UN) report that during 2017, 115 children, 38 boys and 77 girls had been used as human bombs (UNHCR global report 2020 of West and Central Africa posted 4th of Nov 2021).

These backward development in the education sector and other areas of human capital development calls for strategic review of duties and services to students by the Federal Government to address the challenges of gross insurgencies. Today, the security threat in schools calls for new strategies in positioning and providing necessary measures in nipping security related issues in the learning environment at the bud. Thus, it is time for professional counsellors to provide security counselling in order to meet the needs, desires and aspirations

of the helpless students and staff and by extension to the communities around which the schools are established.

Oladejo (2020) defined security counselling as the systematic approach of helping individual or group of people to have better understanding of oneself, themselves and their environment in order to take practical steps to prevent or navigate threats to life or properties. Security counselling services will assist students, staff to be better repositioned to understand the magnitude of security challenges at hand and the best way to navigate physical threats with effective collaboration with relevant active agencies for training and intelligence gathering and sharing.

It was based on the above background that this paper focused on the concepts, overview of threats in learning environment, need for effective management of security information, and the emerging roles of counsellors.

Learning Environment: This is a formal structured environment where teaching and learning activities take place under the gudiance of a teacher who has mastery of subject delivery and learner(s) who desire to learn and acquire knowledge. It could also be an informal setting where teaching and learning takes place between the teacher and the student. Randhawa and Lewis (1976) saw it as a space or an atmosphere where teaching and learning activities take place under the tutelage of a teacher. In the argument of Moss and Ticket (1974), learning environment is a dynamic social system which includes not only teacher's behavior and teacher-student interactions but student-student as well. It is important to add that learning environment has its own life span , its impact and influence are driven by teachers and students. Oladejo (2020) opined that when learning environment is not properly

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managed or secured, it would be counterproductive especially when the teachers and students are exposed to threats and danger.

Threats: Threats from literal meaning and application, implies danger, state of fear that trigger the anxiety level of individuals or group. Threats vary in forms and degree, what matters is individual life and belongings that are in danger. It is a statement of intention to inflict pain, injury, damage or other hostile actions on someone in retribution. Hadik (1996) expressed that threats are challenges to human and social progress, especially when it is directed at children who are defenseless.

Security: Security is the absence of threats to life and properties. It is the process of ensuring the safety of the school actors i.e. school adminsitrators, teachers and non-teachers, students and school properties. Security takes care of people's life for survival in a bid to ensure safety of all school actors for effective learning environment to be ensured.

Counsellor: counsellor is a person that has been trained in the art and science of assisting individuals with different degrees of development and situational issues especially the school aged students (Oladejo, 2020). He further added that counsellor have different certification depending on educational attainment, the least certification is National certificate in Education (NCE) and up to Ph.D. level.

An Overview of Threats in Learning Environment.

The conjectural point of exchange of ideas, thought, information, acquisition of knowledge is referred to as learning environment. Both the learners and the teachers look forward to the time, regrettably such environment has turned to blood sucking field. A report credited to The Guardian dated 18th March 2014 reported that Boko Haram; the Islamic militant have burned down several schools, attacks that have killed hundreds of students in some schools in Yobe

and Adamawa. According to Human Right Watch (2015), it was reported that some groups were responsible for the deaths of over 6,644 people in Nigeria and Cameroon in 2014. At least 611 teachers have been deliberately killed and a further 19,000 teachers have been forced to flee since 2009. In the same view, 910 schools have been reported destroyed and 1500 have been forced to closure. In the year 2016 alone, an estimated number of 952,029 school age children had fled due to the violence.

Education Under Attack 2018 reported by Global Coalition to Protect Education from attack expressed that dozens of schools and Universities in Nigeria were bombed or set on fire by violent extremists, killing hundreds of students, teachers and other educational personnel. University of Maiduguri was targeted repeatedly, as a result of this backward development. By just the mentioning of the name of the school was a signal of threats to many students and staff. With the North East geographical zone due to exposure to attacks. The effort of the military has reduced the rate of attacks in the region.

In a report by OCHA (2017) approximately three million children in the Northeastern Nigeria were in urgent need of education. These attacks and recent ones made learning environment a no go area for both learners and teachers for the fear of their life. The threats are real, and it makes education in the region distorted and not accessible.

Need for Effective Management of Security Information in Learning Environment

The essence of information gathering analysis and management in the period of uncertainties as it affects education cannot be over emphasized by all stakeholders. Efforts should be made to ensure that the protection and prevention of attacks on schools and the students with their administrators is realised. The place of security information is key and must be taken with all seriousness that it deserves. With the background training of professional counsellors in the
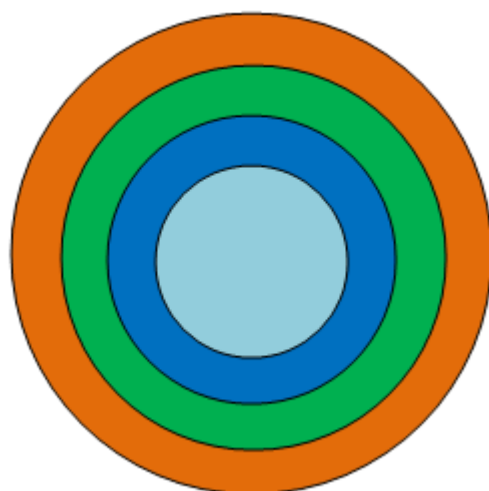
art and science of sourcing for information from their clients, analyzing the client's inference, dream analysis, listening skills, summary and report writing. It is important to state that all these skills and techniques should be deployed to schools in order to ensure effective learning environment.

Security is the presence of peace, law and order, when the opposite happens the state of insecurity has occurred. Obuchi Keizo, former Prime Minister of Japan, in 1998 expressed as follows as "it is my deepest belief that human beings should be able to lead lives of creativity, without having their survival threatened or their dignity impaired". In a similar view, DAC Conflict, Peace and Development Cooperation (CPDC) defined security as follows "security is increasingly viewed as an all encompassing conditions in which people and communities live in freedom, peace and safety" participates fully in the governance of their countries, enjoy the protection of fundamental rights, have access to resources and basic necessities of life and inhabit an environment which is not detrimental to their health and well-being. When learning environment is contending with different dynamism of threats, it is expedient of trained counsellors and other strategic partners in the school to work in synergy to source for credible information, threat warning signs and share information with actionable agencies for immediate responses for intervention. Information received must be protected, source must not be exposed to danger if not and credible sources will be blocked.

There are layers of information or intelligent cycles that professional counsellors must be aware of, information is developed or processed to form intelligence when only necessary facts are retained. The intelligent cycle is the process of developing raw information into finished intelligence for critical decision making and actionable steps.

Fig.1 Intelligence Cycle

Source: https://www.njhomelandsecurity.gov/media/podcast-the-intelligence- cycle

Fig. 2: Layers of Information Sources

This is the Information within the school itself. This comprises of the students, academic staff and non academic staff

Information from parents and friends of the school

Information from the community that plays host to the school; the security agents and youth leaders

Information from key stakeholders, artisans, motor park etc

Source: Researcher's Design

Professional counsellors could leverage articulated layers of information sources as developed by the author in Figure 2. It is expedient that field counsellors and school administrators should have cordial relationship with the inter parties identified for safety of life and school facilities. The intervention could save, reduce negative impact of attack on schools.

Place of Stakeholders Collaboration

The reality on ground calls for effective and purposeful collaborations with all relevant stakeholders to put security at the fore front in the protection of education today and in the future. Effective collaboration will certainly impact positively on learning environment if there are no saboteaurs. For effective learning environment to be achieved, all the stakeholders must be in constant collaboration.

According to Johnson, Johnson & Smith (2007), collaboration has demonstrated promotion of students' academics and social educational outcomes. Likewise, it could be productive in collaborative efforts by stakeholders in addressing threats in learning environment, the following points were noted as outcomes of effective collaborations:

(a) It will encourage synergy with security agencies

(b) Sharing of timely information/intelligence

(c) Creating active channels of information

(d) Involvement and mobilization of interest group on preventive strategies to threat in learning environment.

(e) Promotion of formidable partner and defending common goals and aspirations

Professional counsellors need to profitably handle this potential in carrying out their roles.

Emerging Security Role of Counselors

The continuous security challenges confronting educational institutions especially at Universal Basic Education level that has been serious targets of attacks and killing of innocent students and teachers has informed the articulation of new emerging role of security or intelligence staff for counsellors in the school system with consideration to their background and prerequisite training, it is therefore important that counsellors maintain

vigilance of school environment, interact with security agencies and other stakeholders on intelligence gathering and sharing, prevent and reduce impact of attacks in school. The new roles of counselors include:

(1) Liaising with other staff on security information that affect global community and make deductions on likely impact on their own learning environment.

(2) Study partners of attacks overtime and make deductions on the safety of their school and environment

(3) Represent school authorities on security meetings within their location and brief accurately on who the details are meant for only

(4) Keep records of security meeting and information with utmost confidentiality

(5) Carry out physical security assessment of schools with relevant actionable agencies

(6) Provide security information to staff and students periodically

(7) Keep active communication lines for smooth flow of information.

(8) Seek collaborations with strategic partners with due permission of school authority.

Profiling Learning Environment Threats

The responsibilities of all staff both teaching and non-teaching is to look out for anything, be it object, materials, liquid, person, development, happenings, news, strange behaviours from staff and students that could pose danger to one person or others should be reported and prevented by all. Students and staff need information and awareness that security is a responsibility for all, when danger happens, it is only God that knows who will survive the attack. Therefore, items that are not familiar with learning environment should be quickly reported, it is expedient that counsellors are not to move close to identified objects, materials

found within or outside learning environment. It is a responsibility to activate your active lines for calls on relevant agents or agencies for speedy responses in the school.

The author of this paper identified the following threats that are retrogressive to learning environment such as:

(a) Intended Threat: These are calculated danger structure towards a specified target, it is aimed to hurt and cause massive injuries and destruction to a particular place, person or group if not prevented or mitigated. The impact is grave, for example a student that is enrolled in a school system for years who could be used as bomb carrier into the environment.

(b) Physical Threat: These are danger that are visible but just buying time to take place, unfenced schools or school located around the general areas of militants or environment without protective force and response channel.

(c) Accidental Threat: These are threats that affect individual or group accidentally, the chances of survival are thin, it cuts preparation and manuals off guard. Casualties are mostly massive, it is a tracked disaster.

(d) Situational Threat: These are threats that attract backside effects to victims, this type of threats generate influence of events, time and personally with based interest to inflict injuries on other.

Conclusion

The importance of professional counsellors in any learning environment over the years cannot be over emphasized, they have successfully helped millions of students, staff out of difficulties, resolving personal-socio related problems. Vocational and career progression of students has been a successful record on the part of counselling profession, the current reality

of insecurities contending with learning environment calls for restrategizing of efforts on the part of counsellors that the entire school system look up to as solution providers, to set in new roles of providing security related interventions of profiling of threats, manage the information effectively and know how to process the information into intelligence and share the intelligence timely without delay to actionable agencies that will response quickly for prevention and mitigation of impact. The importance of this paper to contribution of knowledge will assist in the time of global attack on education.

Recommendations

For survival of life and school properties, it is encouraged for preferred new roles for professional counsellors in Nigeria and beyond with the following recommendations:

(1) Federal, state and local government should invest in capacities development of student's counsellors under training with security education and review of their curriculum to accommodate present reality.

(2) Federal Ministry of Education to partner with counselling association nationwide for specialized short and impactful security courses for field partners at Nigeria Army Resource Centre and other credible institutions.

(3) School administration should encourage post in counsellors to assure their new responsibilities in their respectful schools to mitigate attack with intelligence

(4) Professional counsellors should seek training in related courses for self development with security institutions on information security Incident Management, Information security Programme Development and Management, Nigeria Police Force, Nigeria Civil Defence and Security, Information Risk Management, Information Security Governance, Information Security Awareness Training, Cyber Security

(5) Security agencies should expand their security meeting school counsellors in their areas of responsibilities.

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