

# Counselling Techniques as Veritable Tools for Attitudinal Change of Nigerian Youths

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## Abstract

Attitudinal change could be seen as moving from one life style to another, especially when such life pattern is abhorred by good society. Nigeria has been labeled internationally with so many negative names ranging from ‘corrupt’ to ‘unjust’. Most of the Nigerian adults have lived with these names that they appear to have imbibed them as their only way of life; so attention here has been directed to the youths who are the future leaders. Counselling as a helping relationship geared towards the amelioration of problems has been suggested in order to bring about attitudinal change in Nigerian youths. Specifically, the cognitive re-structuring and role modelling techniques have been extrapolated as relevant to the Nigerian attitudinal problems. It is hoped that if the Nigerian youths have the right kind of role models there could be some attitudinal change. It is also hoped that since illogical and irrational belief systems abound in Nigeria; if the youths could become more rational and logical in their thoughts they might decide to be the change agents needed for a better Nigeria; where equity, justice and fair-play will reign.

**Keywords:** Counselling, cognitive restructuring, role modelling, attitudinal change, Nigerian youths

## 1. INTRODUCTION

As recorded in Proverbs 11:14 ‘where there is no counsel, the people fall; but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety’ (King James 1998). This statement needs to be considered for any country where it appears that things are not done right. In Nigeria there have been so much clarion calls for attitudinal change, both at the Federal and State levels. Elechi’s (2008) attitudinal change launched on 1<sup>st</sup> October, 2008 and Akunyili’s (2009) re-branding launched on 17<sup>th</sup> March, 2009, are all indicators of an unsatisfactory state of affairs in Nigeria. Even at the international level the reputation of Nigeria is at state, having been branded as a country where corruption, poverty and injustice reign; and recently rated as the 6<sup>th</sup> in kidnapping cases all over the world (Akunyili 2009). If we take our minds back to any time we had need to hire a contractor or a lawyer, or had need for the services of a dentist or an accountant, we did not hire anyone, but based on their reputation (Fombrun 1996 p.1). In Nigeria, as Ogbuagu (2007) lamented through his music, every sector of the economy shows evidence of corruption, mismanagement, poor attitude to work, mediocrity, irresponsibility, tribalism, nepotism and lack of consideration for the poor masses. The rich get richer as the poor get poorer due to extortion and their exclusion from the general sharing of the goods of the land; evidence of negative attitude. Operationally, attitude can be seen as disposition, standpoint, viewpoint, aspect, pose, position or stand. It is somebody’s way of life which could be positive or negative. When therefore, the attitude is negative, it needs to be changed. To change can be a wonderful prospect, though often it meets with resistance. The transformation should begin within us and could take a lot of persistence. Attitudinal change is moving from one style of life to another, especially when such life pattern is abhorred by good society. There is a need for attitudinal change in Nigeria, and the desire must be there. Personal integrity must over-ride the desire for wealth accumulation. Desire for honesty must over-ride

the desire for power; while decency must replace fraud. Desire for honour must take over the desire for mediocrity, contentment for evil appetite and fair play for injustice. Hoover (1900) observed that older men declare war, but it is the youths that must fight and die. Since most of the adults in Nigeria like the yam tendrils are too old to bend, any remediation programme must of a necessity be directed towards the youths.

## **2. WHO ARE THE NIGERIAN YOUTHS?**

The youths in the first instance are young people between the ages of thirteen and thirty; among these are teenagers and young adults who may still be carrying over some of the characteristics of adolescence – the period of storm and stress. They are at the period when cognitive development is arriving at the apex; a transition period from dependent childhood to self-sustaining and sufficient adulthood (Mgboro, 2004); but in Nigeria the youths lack the necessary financial independence to set them free from adult influences. They are vibrant, energetic, inquisitive, adventurous, risk taker and identity seekers. Nigerian youths are, therefore youngsters who have grown up under the threat of having no future at all. As Watchtower (2004) puts it “Wars, ecological disaster and economic chaos all loom large on their horizon”. In addition they have more time on their hands to pursue vices since adults around them are too busy chasing wealth and power; to care. They are also in the age of technological advancement, computerized systems, and TV viewing; so influenced by uncensored programmes, excessive display of cruelty, nudity and erotic movies which are often mental fuel for evil. They are, therefore faced with teenage and unwanted pregnancy, STDs and HIV/AIDS. Many youths have become involved with drugs, alcohol and cultism in such high degree that their emotional growth has been affected, and that is why many are seen in the street as mad people, while others have taken to kidnapping people.

The present perverted values which Nigerian youths have to live with may be seen through the leadership styles in Nigeria, economic situation and educational pursuits. As Ogbuagu (2007) argued the youths of Nigeria are told that we are a democratic nation, but they see that elections into various offices in Nigeria have become ‘selections’. During campaigns we see Messiahs, visioners and God ‘sents’; but the moment they are voted in by election or selection, they show their true colours. Their false promises – education for all, food for all, education for all, houses for all etc turn to nothing for all. Some political leaders use youths as their thugs - people that should be future leaders; and the practice has become acceptable as enticement with little money make them to be carried away. The problem such young people may face here is not having good models around them, from whom they could copy the right attitude.

The economic situation in Nigeria leaves much to be desired. Resource control problems abound, as sharing the proceeds from our God given resources now depends on certain criteria like oil States, on-shore/off-shore, dis-advantaged States, dichotomy etc. Business houses are filled with falsehood, ‘fakes’ and ‘originals’ are hard to be differentiated until one begins to use them. Many Nigerians are faced with making quick money, by hook or by crook; that the youths are tempted to drop out of schools to join the bandwagon. Some are workers in one Local Government Area, full time Students in Institutions and traders in the local markets. Depression and frustration becloud the visions, dreams and aspirations of Nigerian youths who may then decide to travel out to other countries to do menial jobs; instead of remaining in their father’s land and watch the great injustices meted out to people.

In their educational pursuits, Nigerian youths have another problem. An average youth manages to write WAEC examination amidst all kinds of examination mal-practice, he scrambles through JAMB through special centres where some examiners are bribed. In the University he is faced with 'sorting and cheating' at exams and other academic dishonesty, which make him to run a serious risk of harming his future educational and career opportunities. Some people decide to just buy certificates at the cyber café instead of struggling and sometimes not succeeding to get a certificate at the end of four or six years (as the case may be). Faced with such a predicament, the Nigerian youths need reassurance that tomorrow will be better. They need to be shown that there are better ways of achieving greatness. They need counselling.

### 3. COUNSELLING

Counselling is seen by Mallum (1990) as "an interpersonal relationship, usually between two individuals, a Counsellor and a Client, in which the principal objectives are the development of the client, the improvement of his welfare and the amelioration of his problems." (p. 14). Group Counselling, however, could be employed when more people with similar problems are involved with the same Counsellor at the same time. Cohn, Combs, Gibian & Sniffen (1963) defined Group Counselling thus:

a dynamic, interpersonal process through which individuals within the normal range of adjustment work within a peer group and with a professionally trained counselor, exploring problems and feelings in an attempt to modify their attitudes so that they are better able to deal with developmental problems (p. 125)

Gazda (1971) maintained that it is a:

dynamic interpersonal process focusing on conscious thought and behaviour involving the therapy functions of permissiveness, orientation to reality, catharsis and mutual trust, caring, understanding, acceptance and support. The therapy functions are created and nurtured in a small group through the sharing of personal concerns with one's peers and the counsellor (p. 152)

Counselling makes use of some techniques which when applied to appropriate situations help to ameliorate problems. The present condition of things in Nigeria could require role modeling and cognitive restructuring techniques to bring about attitudinal change of Nigerian youths.

### 4. COGNITIVE RESTRUCTURING

Ellis (1976) the proponent of the Rational Emotion therapy from where cognitive restructuring emanated viewed man as having the capacity to be both rational and irrational, logical and illogical. He maintained therefore that it is the illogical and irrational beliefs, assumptions and thoughts that make people to have disorder and problems. The Nigeria society is loaded with a lot of illogical and irrational assumptions that make people to have wrong attitudes; and hence transmit same to the younger generation. For example, Nigerians believe that they should not be different from others (nkem di iche bu ajo afa). This belief makes everybody to follow the same line of the erring people. There is the belief that one cannot learn to use the left hand when he is old; when other nationalities are busy trying to learn to do new things even at 70 years and above. It is believed that

external forces or events are responsible for misfortunes and cannot be stopped. Olayinka (1993) opined that such misfortunes could have been overcome with a small push but instead people resign to fate, predestination or even witches. To him it is irrational to think that people have little or no ability to control their sorrows and disturbances; but to remember that man is the architect of his own fortune and needs not condition himself to powerlessness or fate. Nigerians believe in ‘cutting corners’ and ‘short cuts’ because they think that it is easier to avoid certain life difficulties and self responsibilities than to face them. If a man manages to dodge his responsibility he cannot dodge the consequences of dodging his responsibility. Nigerians believe that one should be quite upset over other people’s problems and disturbances. It is alright to be our brother’s keeper; but there is no reason to sink with your brother otherwise you will not have a good head to help your brother.

Some of our illogical and irrational assumptions need to be changed in order to also change our attitude to things. The youths should be made to understand that things will not always remain the same and they could change the nation. They should look beyond what the adults have made the country to be, to that future when a new breed of leaders will emerge, when the talents and efforts of people will be harnessed and used instead of connections to godfathers. They need to realize that the greater part of our happiness or misery depends on our dispositions, and not our circumstances; that evil unchecked grows while evil tolerated poisons the whole system. Ellis (1976, p. 58 -59) gave four ways of bringing about cognitive restructuring:

1. uncovering a person’s past and present illogical and irrational thinking by bringing them forcibly to his attention or consciousness;
2. showing him how they are causing and maintaining his disturbance and unhappiness;
3. demonstrating exactly what the illogical links in the internalized sentences are, and
4. teaching him how to rethink, challenge, contradict and re-verbalize these and other similar sentences so that his internalized thoughts become more logical and efficient.

## **5. ROLE MODELLING**

In role modelling technique an individual is made to learn a new behaviour by observing and reproducing the behaviour of other people. The people observed are called role models. This is also called learning by imitation, which is common among animals and humans; especially children. Nduka-Ozo (2005), observed that children learn more of their behaviour by imitating their parents, teachers, older siblings; or other significant adults that they admire. The models may be life models or film models, what is important is that their behaviour patterns are considered pleasant, impressionable or worthy of emulation. In using role modelling, the counsellor identifies the model to be copied and his behaviour patterns could be simulated in counselling sessions until they are well mastered. In Nigeria there are still some individuals like Prof Dora Akunyili whose attitude to life have remained focused on things that have eternal values and whose motto have remained ‘to shun vices and remain virtuous’. Such people’s attitude could be set up in scenes and acted or simulated over and over again. Examination is made of the content of the role play, analyses made of the acts and lessons drawn from each attitude as acted.

Film models might be used where live models are not easily found for particular rights attitudes or behaviour patterns. According to Krumboltz (1965) using a filmed model has the advantage of structuring and determining just what is to be modeled; in addition to the observer having full attention free from distractions.

Nigerian youths, through modelling could begin to understand that there are people who have lived through life without ‘cutting corners’ and yet achieved success through honest means.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This paper has viewed the clarion calls for attitudinal change and the ‘re-branding’ launched on 17<sup>th</sup> March, 2009, following the international branding of Nigeria as a country where corruption, poverty and injustice reign as indicators of an unsatisfactory state of affairs in Nigeria. Attitudinal change could be seen as moving from one life style to another, especially when such life pattern is abhorred by good society. The search for remedy of the poor attitude of Nigerians could be found in Counselling which is a helping relationship towards the remediation of problems. Specifically, the cognitive re-structuring and role modelling techniques have been viewed as relevant to the Nigerian attitudinal problems. Illogical and irrational belief systems abound in Nigeria, which needs to be changed. Most of the adults have lived with these assumptions that they appear to have imbibed them as their only way of life; so attention has been directed to the youths who are more adventurous, risk takers and the future leaders. It is hoped that if the Nigerian youths could become more rational and logical in their thoughts, look beyond the immediate problem of poor attitude and with the right kind of role models they might decide to be the change agents needed for a better Nigeria; where equity, justice and fair-play will reign.

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