Guidance and counselling in Algeria: a clarion call for a restructured policy in education

Naouel Abdellatif

*Ferhat Abbas University, Campus El Bez, Sétif 19000, ALGERIA

Abstract

Guidance and counselling for lifelong learning in Algeria has become a crucial question of social, economic and political importance that affects both the scope of training and the world of work. Guidance and Counselling are also major personal concerns for each person at different stages of their training and their personal life. Consequently, and in order to provide equality of opportunity, Algeria needs to develop professionals who can provide the appropriate guidance and counselling service to different audiences as to assist them in making the best life choices to suit them. This article will thus provide an opportunity to collate and compare the contributions of Algeria to the areas of guidance and counselling by fostering a multidisciplinary approach to orientation.

Keywords: Guidance and Counselling; Algerian policy of education; Career development; bereavement counselling; ICT; Algerian Educational Reform; Restructured policy of guidance and counselling.

1. Introduction

The current new educational reforms in Algeria (B. Benbouzid, 2002) [1] have caused misunderstanding within the education sector as people switch from old-fashioned education paradigms to new ones. In such a problematic situation, it is the role of guidance counsellors to intervene as a reassuring agent in this process of change. However, no chain being stronger than its weakest link, guidance and counselling services must, themselves, be readapted to the educational paradigm in hand. The professional and practical demands arising from this understanding of education and of training make it imperative that the values to which the Algerian government is committed are informed by fresh research perspectives that contribute to the effective application of actions.

Career development is determined by numerous factors, or a combination thereof (Allen et al., 1995) [2], such as personal interest, knowledge and skills, value systems and, particularly, work or professional ethics. In the face of globalization, however, the Algerian education and training systems should provide all individuals with the opportunity to expand and sharpen their knowledge in order to adapt to the demands of the ever-changing socioeconomic environment. In addition, the memories of terror witnessed by the community, as well as the multiple disasters associated with it, have been major signs of social withdrawal and regression. Not only did they affect scholastic achievement and career intervention, but they blew apart Algerian national identity too. Thus, this article attempts to give practitioners practical tools that can be used to address these problems. Far from being

Naouel Abdellatif. Tel.: +213 772 38 18 42; fax: + 213 36 84 86 85.
E-mail address:abdelatifnawel@yahoo.fr.
merely commonplace assumptions, education should actively enlighten human understanding and advance humankind’s worthy aspirations through guidance and counseling.

Algerian reforms in education have introduced a system of tutoring that is sound in theory but weak in practice. The uncovering of each student’s individuality and promise, learners’ demands for acknowledgement and encouragement, the quality of the encounters with inheritance of learning and their discoveries of personal achievement and limitation seldom feature in Algerian public discourse on education. Yet, they are the realities that confront counsellors in their day-to-day work (Hamoud, 1996) [3]. To engage seriously in such realities as a counsellor is to establish and sustain judicious relationships on the educational and social front. This relationship directly concerns Algerian policies on education and forms a clarion call, not only for policy makers, but for the whole nation too.

2. Overview on the policy of guidance and counselling in Algeria

Over the last nine years, the Department of Education has taken a variety of initiatives to ensure that it is in a position to make maximum use of innovative measures, such as Information and Communication Technologies in support of its various teacher education courses (Hamoud, 1996) [3]. Obviously, this cannot be similarly assumed in the field of guidance and counselling. Many educators maintain that the education system in Algeria should go beyond imparting academic knowledge to our students. Rather, it should aim at whole-person development including character, attitudes, physique and skills. In addition, our students need to know how to become responsible and caring individuals. (Education Commission, 1999) [4]

The Algerian Department of Education has traditionally not recognized the importance of student guidance work in Secondary schools. However, this has happened between 1982 and 1986 by providing a total of five additional counsellors (Education Commission, 1999, Official Paper N° 827/1990). In 1993, the Education Commission, in its report N°. 93/245, recommended the implementation of a comprehensive approach to guidance and counselling in schools to improve the quality of education. However, the missing link was that no counsellor was appointed at Primary and Middle School levels because appointed teachers considered it to be a para-profession practice.

In principle, there has been a traditional expectation in the Algerian schools that teachers should be encouraged to adopt a guidance role. In practice, the size of classes and the subject-based fragmentation of the curriculum have prevented this. In recent years, however, with the implementation of the educational reform of 2002 and its aim to aspire to the “Intelligent” education of the twenty-first century, Algeria has increased its focus on the inclusion of guidance elements within the curriculum itself; career education and lifelong learning, however, cannot operate on a stand-alone basis. Thus, an emphasis is put upon the inclusion of a tutoring system that might lessen the pressure on counsellors and promote a strong base of learning over time.

3. Key issues for the provision of guidance and counselling in Algeria

Learning is being viewed as lifelong, taking place not only in educational institutions, but also in multiple settings. In this sense, the distinction between guidance and counseling is less credible. The term “guidance” as explained by Wilson and Jackson (1999) [5] has proved difficult to market to adults outside educational settings, partly because people do not quite know what it means. For the sake of making it sound more plausible, guidance needs to be linked to particular careers. Thus, talking about career guidance in this sense would be more affirmative in its usage as a lifelong practice. “Career guidance is then focused on helping individuals not to choose a career but to construct it” (Watts, 1999) [6]. The need for both of these forms of guidance in the Algerian context needs to be clearly understood.

When looking at these elements in the Algerian context, action is also needed at the level of public policy, professionalization and the economic and social markets. This would seem a problematic situation for the Algerian reform, which focuses on the results to be obtained rather than ways of how to achieve them. In this sense, guidance is a process rather than a product. It is also a means to ensure success and not an end itself. As a matter of fact, a
long-term strategy for education should place guidance and counselling practice at its heart in order to assure its success.

Tait (1999) [7] has argued against such reductionism, pointing out the potential of new Information and Communication Technologies to transmit information and also change what is meant by space, time and physical practice. This should certainly also apply to Algeria. Thus, the Algerian government needs to be more interactive, taking into account the relation between the individual and his institution. It is essential to value the experiences of individuals who have had to move from one career to another. In the Algerian context, this should be strongly emphasized given the historical background of catastrophes witnessed by the Algerian community. This, again, highlights the need for stronger links between the fields of guidance and counselling.

4. Psychological Theory and Guidance and Counselling Practice

The organization of guidance and counselling is a complex process in both its study and its implementation. It is true that everyone does acquire some of such knowledge through ordinary human intercourse and by reading literature. However, counsellors must be able to go further in adapting themselves rapidly to many different personalities. People in the Algerian society generally believe that talking to a counsellor is, in most cases, a form of weakness and psychological instability. This makes it hard for both the counsellor and the counselee to reach an understanding in such a complex situation. Positive change, however, depends upon having a systematic procedure for establishing objectives and assessing outcomes. As we move forward, globalisation imposes itself through social and economic practices that touch upon all the aspects of living. Algeria is no exception to these changes and is, more sensitive and sceptical than other developing and developed countries. The past decade of terror witnessed by Algerian society, for example, impinges directly on the present context and emphasises the need for further research. Such research should establish not only the nature of the impact of disaster and terrorism on the population but also define measures of effective intervention too. Those who might benefit most from this – but who are often overlooked – are children and adolescents. In this sense, the Algerian National Education Department should include in the reform some developmental approaches to children’s understanding and treatment of grief and loss. A distinction should also be made clear between phenomenology of bereavement and trauma. Family and community support are also essential elements to be included in guidance and counselling practice, including psychological first aid and cognitive behavioural therapy. There is insufficient space here to elaborate on all of the challenges facing Algerian school counselling in the new millennium. Suffice it to say, I will describe the research I have undertaken in order to understand some of the causes and consequences of the state of the art of guidance and counselling in Algeria and then conclude by outlining the multiple suggestions I would make and perspectives I propose adopting.

5. Research methodology

In seeking multiple interpretations of reality in the Algerian guidance and counselling experience, I have been concerned not to take a reductionist stance. Thus, through an initial inductive process, I have endeavoured to capture the “thick descriptions” of students’, counsellors’ and principals’ experiences before undertaking a thorough exploration of summary charts or statistical interpretations. The multiple data collection methods provided a holistic interpretative “view” of the complex guidance and counselling experiences and acted as both pedagogic interventions and as an inductive research methodology. I also conducted focus groups, while interviewing the samples, to act as a validation instrument for the emerging themes from the interviews’ analysis. The techniques used recognise the sensitivity required when working at what might be perceived as the boundary between the academic and the personal, and so ethical issues were considered early on when planning and designing the research. In gathering data on for the research, I have been careful not only to seek permission, but to allow a high degree of freedom of personal expression, and so I have often asked relatively simple, open questions.

The five proposed methods used for this research endeavour are described below. I originally decided to canvass opinion from five different perspectives within the fields of guidance and counselling experience. These are:
a. Principals
b. Guidance counsellors
c. Teachers’ and other working staff,
d. Pupils’/students’
e. Parents’

A full cohort of 170 pupils/students were involved in the research phase as well as three (3) principals, two (2) guidance counsellors and three (3) teachers taking charge of the guidance and counselling responsibility. The parents numbered 130.

5. 1. Aims of the present methodology

The evaluation surveys were carried out mainly through a longitudinal study of three years, starting in December 2004 and ending in June 2007. However, the method covered a cross-sectional study as it was impossible to work on the same sample to cover the five levels of this investigation. The surveys, retrospectively, covered educational guidance and counselling delivered since the school year 2004-2005. The evaluation material consisted of two questionnaires collected from principals (N=3), guidance counsellors (N=2) and pupils/students (N=170). Also, data from two more in depth interviews were gathered from the pupils/students, principals, guidance counsellors and teachers as well as a cover letter to parents (N=130). At each level of inquiry, and with a view to gaining information on the transition phases, the surveys were carried out at a time when pupils and students had just made a transition. For example, the pupils asked to evaluate educational guidance and counselling in the upper classes of basic education had just started their first year of study in general Secondary school. The evaluation study surveyed five educational establishments:

a. Ikhwa Berchi Primary school in Sétif,
b. Hassen Ghadjeti Middle school in Sétif,
c. Malika Gaid Secondary school in Sétif, and
d. Ferhat Abbas University: Department of Foreign Languages, English section of Sétif,
e. Adult Education and Management Business Institute (MBI) in Sétif: private school for the enhancement of lifelong learning.

The gathered variables were calculated from questions covering each area of guidance and counselling separately for each pupil/student group, the guidance counsellors, the principals and the education providers. Accordingly, different groups have summed up variables with the same names and, on principle, contributed to a multi-faceted interpretation.

5. 2. The research methods

Since I began investigating lifelong learning, the population was expected to cover the five transitory levels of learning. However, given the size of the population, I have opted for a selection of a random sampling from each level, taking into consideration a limited number of participants. Thus, I have opted for the case study, investigating each group separately over an interval of three years’ time. The great strength of using the case study is the ability to concentrate on a small sample of the whole population. Furthermore, it functions as a means of identifying key issues about guidance and counselling, and lifelong learning in Algeria that merit further investigation. The case study is, also, a way by which I could analyse qualitative data gathered from the questionnaires, interviews and cover letter and, then, form possible recommendations to assist counsellors, principals, teachers and parents to adapt to new roles and to innovate at a stage of development in an institution. The analysis of the results helped us to come up with the following strategic elements for a restructured policy in guidance and counselling.

6. Analysis and perspectives

The study described the evaluation processes, the main findings, the recommendations and the national initiatives that should be taken to promote guidance provision from a lifelong perspective. The focus is on different
dimensions in guidance provision and existing tools for the dialogue between policymakers and the guidance and counselling community. When national bodies are taking concrete measures in implementing lifelong learning strategies, guidance and counselling should be described as an integral element of the lifelong learning process not only from policy perspective but also from practice perspective. Over the years, the role of counsellors has evolved and widened in scope in Algeria as the understanding of learning and human development has deepened. One significant change has been the collaborative approach to planning and problem solving proposed by the 2002 reform. Parent outreach and multi-systemic interventions are much more common. Schools are using interdisciplinary team approaches to meet the needs of students and to develop appropriate interventions. Because of the nature of their training and their work, counsellors are in a position to call attention to situations that hinder the success of students and to provide leadership in identifying issues, assessing students’ needs and facilitating interventions.

Furthermore, guidance and counselling services in Algeria have often suffered from other constraints. They have mainly focused on decision-making strategies rather than occupational and career choices. Such problems have been made even worse when counsellors have had to deal with administrative duties, personal and social guidance as well as educational and vocational counselling for thousands of students per counsellor. Another problem that emerged in the analysis was that school-based guidance services were put under pressure as they had to place the institutional needs before those of their students. However, keeping up to date with progress in each field has been one of their priorities since 2002. The race for policy-makers is now to innovate in the guidance and counselling process according to the priorities of globalization and the job market. Diplomas acquired at an early stage of life will no longer be passports for life: hence why guidance and counselling need to be a lifelong career process for lifelong learning.

Lastly, guidance and counselling in Algeria need to focus on social and cultural disparities reducing inequalities in order to give everybody a chance to learn and to acquire a social standing. It is the ideal of social justice and equal opportunity to take into consideration sectors of the Algerian society who have suffered from terrorist attacks, natural disasters and catastrophes.

7. Conclusion

The present article has affirmed that globalization presents new challenges to guidance and counselling in Algeria. It has met many others all along the reforms appropriate to it. However, families and children evolve continuously and the guidance and counselling programmes in our schools need to constantly renew themselves to better respond to the changing architecture of Algerian society. Reflecting on the results obtained from the instruments used for this research, many parents continue to be unaware of the guidance counsellors’ roles and functions. There is still a need to work on a triangular relationship that gathers parents, decision-makers and learners together. In addition, there is limited research concerning guidance and counselling in Algeria. Therefore, further empirical data needs to be gathered in order to gain insight into and awareness of new perceptions about the service. This would help advance our children’s academic, personal and social growth and, thus, encourage them to be active participants in a lifelong learners’ community.

References