

THE IMPERATIVE OF GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING IN NIGERIAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS: THE CHALLENGES AND IMPLICATIONS

*¹Zainab Lawal Ibrahim, ²Fasasi, Lukman, & ³Tolefe Dumebi Pamela

¹Federal Government College,
Sokoto State, Nigeria
Email: zainablawalyarinci@gmail.com

²Federal College of Education,
Sokoto State, Nigerai

³Federal College of Education, FCE (Tech),
Asaba-Nigeria

Abstract

Guidance and counselling are essential components of a comprehensive education system, yet they are often overlooked in Nigerian schools. This paper highlights the significance of guidance and counselling in promoting academic achievement, personal growth, and social development among Nigerian students. It discusses the challenges faced by students, the benefits of guidance and counselling, and best practices for effective implementation. The paper concludes by emphasizing the need for increased investment in guidance and counselling programs to support the well-being and success of Nigerian students. Guidance and counselling in Nigerian secondary schools have significant implications for students, teachers, and the education system as a whole. Some of these implications include: Improved Academic Performance, reduced dropout rates, the study suggest that the Nigerian government should prioritize funding for guidance and counselling programs in schools and schools should employ qualified guidance counsellors and provide on-going training and development.

Keywords: Guidance, Counselling, Implication, Challenges, Secondary Schools

Introduction

Education is a critical factor in the development of any nation, and Nigeria is no exception. However, the country's education system faces numerous challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, insufficient resources, and a shortage of qualified teachers. Amidst these challenges, guidance and counselling services are often neglected, leaving students without the support they need to navigate academic and personal issues. This paper argues that guidance and counselling are vital components of Nigerian schools, essential for promoting academic success, personal growth, and social development.

In the school system, the vital aim of guidance and counselling is to guide and prepare students for a better future. Though guidance and counselling may not be a time-tabled activity as teaching, McLaughlin (1999) asserts that it carries an educational function. This means its place in the school system is no less important.

The activities of counsellors appear to be unclear within the education sector in most African countries, including Nigeria. This lack of clarity can be attributed to the fact that counselling is a relatively new profession in African education systems. Opinions differ on counsellors' roles and responsibilities owing to the fact that counsellors perform a wide range of different activities. In Nigeria, counsellors often perform the regular classroom teachers' work and are assigned administrative functions in addition to guiding students to resolve their personal-social problems.

Walker, Alloway, Dalley-Trim, & Patterson (2006); Agi, (2014) equally discovered that prompt counsellor response to student inquiries created positive perceptions about the counsellor in the mind of the student. Egbo (2015) contend that respect for and recognition of the individual differences of students is central to the guidance and counselling process. Thus, students perceive counsellors to be impactful in their choices in life if those counsellors recognize the individual differences of each student and strive to meet the needs shown by these differences as appropriately as possible. The American Personnel and Guidance Association Statement of Policy on the characteristics of a good counsellor buttress this by saying that a good counsellor is one who belief in each individual. The counsellor believes in the personal worth of each person, in his capacity for growth and change, and in his ability to cope with life situation

The scope of school counsellors according to the American School Counselling Association (ASCA) includes assisting students to develop their educational, social, career, and personal strengths; to help them develop healthy habits, values and positive attitudes; to encourage them to understand themselves and their abilities; to evaluate their academic progress; to assist them to adjust to school; and increase personal satisfaction (Willys, 2017). Counsellors' functions are crucial as they help to facilitate the holistic development of students and ensure the achievement of educational goals. Different stakeholders (school administrators, teachers, parents, students, and other interested groups) may have different opinions about the appropriate work of counsellors. Teachers perceive counsellors' roles within the education system based on their encounters with counsellors. Joy, Hesson, and Harris (2011) asserted that teachers were generally satisfied with counselling services, although their level of satisfaction varied across grade levels and depended on the specific area provided by the school counsellors.

Challenges Faced by Nigerian Students

Lawal, Khan and Bin Ramli, (2021) opined that Nigerian students face numerous challenges that can impact their academic performance and personal well-being. Some of these challenges include:

- I. Limited access to resources and infrastructure.
- II. Large class sizes and inadequate teacher training.
- III. Societal pressure and expectations.
- IV. Limited access to mental health services
- V. Lack of proper guidance on career choice

Nigerian secondary school students faced the above challenges and they find it difficult to go for counselling, (Lawal, Khan Bin Ramli, 2021). This attitude has been perpetuated due to the rumour and gossip many hold through years of observation in school that guidance and counselling is for those who are academically weak or excessively truants, (Ogunlade and Akeredolu 2012) another discovery is that most counsellors in the school system are untrained and this can affect efficiency and the ability to bring more clients (students) for counselling.

Fox and Butler (2007); Patrick et al., (2013) found that some student's problem with school guidance and counselling services was that it was not widely known. While, Chan and Quinn (2012) opined the students desist from counselling for fear of being stigmatized by teachers and peers in the school. However, as much possible, makes the students to avoid the counsellors and their office. Majority of students made career choices without much information because the students do not have proper knowledge of counselling services, availability of guidance and counselling services in the school, absence of professionally trained counsellors with the requisite knowledge were either absent or large influence by their peers and parents' preference for certain careers. School counsellors are not significant in the decision making process because students may have some perception about these counsellors which prevents them from seeking guidance and counselling on career choices.

However, the greater the professional knowledge and expertise of the counsellor, the more likely students are to seek counselling service help in periods of need. Again, some students doubt the degree of confidentiality assured by counsellors and that serve as a hindrance to their seeking guidance or counselling services (Jenkins & Palmer, 2011; Mushaandja, Haihambo, Vergnani, and Frank, 2015). Thus, this hinders, the natural human conversation process, between both parties (Fox & Butler, 2007). Without such a conversation, better guidance and counselling which is a product of the conversational process will not be possible. In Nigeria, guidance and counselling in secondary schools are crucial to address the above-mentioned challenges by:

- I. Providing academic and career guidance.
- II. Offering emotional support and counselling.
- III. Fostering a supportive school environment.
- IV. Encouraging student engagement and participation

Awingsong, Dawson, & Gidiglo, (2015); and Willys (2017) described counsellors' roles as including academic, career, personal, and social development of students. It is within this context that this paper considers Nigerian counsellors' perceptions of the importance of the five dimensions of school-based counselling practice, using the International Survey of School Counsellors' Activities Awingsong, Dawson, and Gidiglo, (2015). It is meant to assist students to cope with challenges pertaining to their psychological development, personal concerns and to facilitate the learning process (Willys, 2017). Willys' (2017) added that school counsellor's work as designers of appropriate intervention programs which address students' problems of bullying, social exclusion, scholastic underachievement, and substance abuse.

The study of Ibrahim, Aloka, Wambiya, and Raburu (2014) revealed that counselling services assist to attain spiritual growth, health. Joy et al. (2011) revealed that 72.9% and 56% of their respondents (students) respectively perceived counselling services(individual counselling) to be very effective in assisting students to resolve and cope with problems of a personal nature, such as, traumatic events, academic stress/anxiety, financial struggle, problems at home and bullying. Similarly, Willys (2017) and Lasode, Lawal, and Ofodile (2017) revealed that group counselling is effective in assisting students to develop competencies that help them adjust to different situations and make appropriate decisions in life. Thus, counselling services (group and individual) afford students opportunities to enhance personal growth and improve decision-making regarding values, interpersonal relationships, and other goals within a stressful student academic environment.

Importance of Guidance and Counselling in Nigerian Schools

Guidance and counselling services can help address these challenges by:

- I. Providing academic and career guidance.
- II. Offering emotional support and counselling.
- III. Fostering a supportive school environment.
- IV. Encouraging student engagement and participation

High school drop-out rates result in unemployment, poverty, low quality of life, high dependency ratio and many other social problems which call for an effective career guidance programme in schools, (Awingsong, Dawson and Gidiglo 2015). But, getting students to talk to counsellors remain unrealistic given the varying perceptions students hold about counsellors which hinder the natural human conversation process between both parties (Fox & Butler, 2007). Without such a conversation, good career decisions, which are a product of the conversational process, will not be possible. And since counsellors hold great secrets and information in store, these treasures are lost forever to these students Lack of enthusiasm in a chosen field, low productivity at work, emotional depression, and lack of focus in life are some of the consequences of bad career decisions made by students (Fox & Butler, 2007).

Another problem faced by secondary school students is high school drop-out rates which result in unemployment, poverty, low quality of life, high dependency ratio and many other social problems which call for an effective career guidance programme in schools. The secondary school counsellors can use cognitive behavioural therapy and social cognitive therapy, to assist students on issues of drug abuse, bullying, vandalism, cultism, stealing and other social vices that lead to school drop-out. The school counsellors can make use of different psychological test instruments such as study habit inventory(SHI), career interest inventory(CII) , to assess the students.

The Advocacy and Systemic Improvement dimension reflects activities relating to advocacy for students, effective school policies and practices along with program evaluation and improvement. The counsellors play an advocacy role as they show concern on issues or factors that will enhance the welfare of students and collaborate with

school officials to ensure a very conducive school climate appropriate for students to learn.

They equally conduct evaluation procedures on the different educational programs and offer suggestions with the intent of improving the school system. Thus, promoting and initiating policies which guarantee a safe and positive environment for students. Counsellors in Nigeria may volunteer to work as a school liaison to help ensure “student friendly” policies. Lasode et al. (2017) noted that counsellors act as liaison officers for schools and are responsible for contacting appropriate agencies as needed and become the link between the school, parents and other institutions. Joy et al. (2011) found that secondary school students perceived school counsellors' responsibilities to include mediation and conflict resolution.

The studies mentioned above were intended to draw awareness to the importance of the school counsellor in the education sector and to enhance a better service delivery. But, none of them has comprehensively examined implications of counsellors' activities from a nation-wide perspective. The current effort is to examine Imperatives, challenges and implications of counselling in Nigerian secondary schools. To that effect, the study assessed the following concerns: challenges faced by Nigerian secondary students, challenges faced by secondary school counsellors, importance's of guidance and counselling and implication of guidance and counselling in Nigerian secondary schools.

Previous studies such as Mweemba (2016) found that school counsellors assist students to adapt to the school routine and overcome life challenges. Similarly, Mikaye (2012) revealed that counsellors assist in the maintenance of discipline among students for academic gains. *Principals' Perceptions of Guidance and Counselling Services in Kwara State Secondary Schools, Nigeria: Implication for Stakeholders*. The findings of the study revealed that principals believe the provision of counselling services had a significant impact on student's academic achievement, even though most of the secondary schools do not have a good counselling unit, qualified counsellors, and counselling facilities.

Modo, Sanni, Uwah and Mogbo (2013) conducted a study on guidance and counselling services as the coping measures for the academic achievement of students in secondary schools in Nigeria. The purpose of the research was to determine the influence of counselling services on students' academic achievement. The outcome of the study found a significant relationship between guidance and counselling services and academic performance in Nigerian secondary schools. Likewise, Peter, et. al., (2018) investigated the effect of guidance services on student attitudes, study habits and academic performance in secondary schools. The researcher found that the presence of guidance services in secondary schools has a positive correlation with study habits, attitudes and academic achievement. The study observed that the scope of future studies should be widened.

Agbajor And Alordiah. 2014 *Attitude Of Principals To Quality Guidance And Counselling Services: Implication For Attitudinal Change*. The findings showed that factors such as sex, type of school and principal's counselling background have great influence on attitude of principal to quality guidance and counselling services provision. Others studied the factors affecting students' perception of school counsellors' roles (Aluede & Imonikhe 2002; Awinsong, et al., 2015; Uju, 2018 Willys, 2017).

Benefits of Guidance and Counselling:

Guidance and counselling services offer numerous benefits, including:

- I. Improved academic achievement and career development
- II. Enhanced personal and social growth and self-awareness.
- III. Better social skills and relationships.
- IV. Building self-esteem and confidence.
- V. Improved mental health and emotional well-being
- VI. Improving student-teacher relationships
- VII. Enhancing overall school experience

Challenges Faced by Secondary School Counsellors

The need to maximize the benefits of school-based services like guidance and counselling therefore cannot be over emphasized. Counselling services in schools have been found to be lacking (Adejimola & Tayo-Olajubu, 2009). This subsequently affects students' access to information about, orientation, subject combination, and guidance and career choices at the secondary school level. Fia (2011) undertook a study of guidance and counselling services in schools, he reported that educational, vocational, and person-social counselling were lacking in schools. T

he absence of group school counselling of students by any counsellor in the school was noted to have created ignorance among students about counselling. Nwokolo, et al., (2010) in a Nigerian study discovered that services for academic guidance and counselling were not available in schools. Of five states that were studied, two states- Ebonyi and Enugu- had no guidance and counselling centres in most of their schools. This was attributed to the lack of deepened awareness of the relevance of counselling. They report that group counselling, which can be effective in large schools or school districts, was not carried out.

Over the years, school counsellors in several schools in Nigeria have been made to perform additional responsibilities, especially serving as subject teachers at the detriment of directing and coordinating counselling activities in their schools. Menon (2010) found that the dual responsibilities of teacher and counsellor adversely affected access to counselling programmes by most students. Many counsellors in this study complained about the lack of a defined role for the counsellor in the school which results in most counsellors becoming engaged in non-counselling related work.

This development was possible because of a lack of documentation of the specified roles of school counsellors in Nigeria, which also in many instances resulted in uncertainty and related ambiguities about the actual duties and involvements of school counsellors in Nigerian schools (Aluede, et al., 2019). It is important, however, to observe that the Federal Ministry of Education in recognition of this concern and in the effort to stem it has recently offered clear specifications and deliberate prescriptions on the roles of school counsellors in Nigeria's schools (Federal Ministry of Education, 2018).

Ogunlade and Akeredolu (2012) learnt from their study that most students made wrong career decisions because of they had no informed counsellors to support them in their decision-making process. Many students therefore held counsellors to be impactful in their career choice making if these counsellors are well informed, intelligent, and well researched. Counsellors armed with a wide repertoire of knowledge are deemed important and impactful in students' choice making (Eliamani, Richard, & Peter, 2014).

One-on-one counselling interactions; between the counsellors and the students was found to be lacking and thus entrenched the belief of counselling unavailability. Offor (2008) concurs that counselling services in most Nigerian schools were non-existent though they are supposed to be. It was realized that though policy makers design policies on counselling and guidance for schools, the lack of certain fundamentals like resources, administrative commitment, and expertise mitigate the realization of the aims envisaged in such policy documentation. Okeke and Okorie (2006) reported from a study in south-east Nigeria that there was a lack of counselling centres in schools. Failure to offer or effectively provide guidance services has often led to wrong career path decisions that have adversely affected the victims and the nation.

This absence of professionally trained counsellors discouraged students from seeking guidance and counselling. Eliamani, Richard, and Peter, (2014) also found non-professional counselling greatly affected access to counselling services. The lack of trained counsellors in Tanzanian schools, they found, denied and discouraged many students accessing professional services. Anagbogu (2008) reported that many school counsellors do not have access to the requisite professional training that empower them to be impactful in schools. Ogunlade and Akeredolu (2012) advise that counsellors should be given more training to prepare them for work.

Across these countries, establishing the role and activities of school counsellors is an important professional and policy research issue. Recent research on the role and activities of school counsellors has been conducted, for example, in China (Shi & Leuwerke, 2010), India Results of the lead article (Carey et al., 2020) indicated that there are at least five important dimensions along which school-based counselling practice differs across countries. Countries differ on the salience accorded to: Counselling Services, Advocacy and Systemic Improvement, Prevention Programs, Administrator Role, and Educational and Career Planning. These five dimensions can provide a useful way to describe differences in modes of practice and can consequently be very worthwhile in cross-national comparative research on school-based counselling.

Best counselling practices for effective implementation

To ensure the effective implementation of guidance and counselling services in Nigerian Schools, government, schools, PTA and stakeholders should consider the following best practices:

- I. Training and development for guidance counsellors.
- II. Collaboration with parents and teachers.
- III. Individual and group counselling sessions.
- IV. Peer mentoring and support groups.
- V. Referrals to external resources and services

Implications of Guidance and Counselling in Nigerian Secondary Schools

Guidance and counselling in education have numerous implications that impact students, teachers, and the wider educational community. Some of these implications include:

- I. **Improved Academic Performance:** Guidance and counselling help students achieve academic success, leading to better grades and higher graduation rates.
- II. **Career Development:** Guidance and counselling assist students in exploring career options, making informed decisions, and developing employability skills.
- III. **Personal and Social Development:** Guidance and counselling foster personal growth, self-awareness, and social skills, enabling students to navigate complex relationships and challenges.
- IV. **Reduced Dropout Rates:** Guidance and counselling help identify and address factors contributing to dropout, ensuring students remain in education.
- V. **Better Teacher-Student Relationships:** Guidance and counselling facilitate collaboration between teachers and students, promoting a supportive and inclusive learning environment.
- VI. **Increased Student Engagement:** Guidance and counselling encourage student participation, motivation, and engagement in the learning process.
- VII. **Improved Mental Health:** Guidance and counselling provide emotional support, helping students manage stress, anxiety, and other mental health concerns.
- VIII. **Conflict Resolution:** Guidance and counselling help resolve conflicts and address social issues, promoting a peaceful and inclusive school environment.
- IX. **Parental Involvement:** Guidance and counselling encourage parental engagement, fostering a collaborative approach to student support and development.
- X. **Teacher Professional Development:** Guidance and counselling enable teachers to develop their skills and knowledge, enhancing overall teaching quality.
- XI. **Curriculum Development:** Guidance and counselling inform curriculum development, ensuring it meets the needs of students and prepares them for future challenges.
- XII. **Community Partnerships:** Guidance and counselling facilitate partnerships with local organizations, providing resources and support for students and families.

By acknowledging and addressing the above-said and implications of guidance and counselling in secondary schools and Nigerian education as a whole, we can create a comprehensive and supportive learning environment that fosters student success and well-being.

There is no study without limitations. This studies limitations was that it was a general studies on Nigerian secondary school counsellors. It did not examine primary schools, tertiary institutions. The study did not examine Nigerian secondary school counsellors based on states and schools in particular.

Recommendations

- I. The idea of teacher-counsellor should be reconsidered in secondary schools.
- II. Schools should employ qualified guidance counsellors and provide on-going training and development.
- III. Parents and teachers should be encouraged to collaborate with guidance counsellors to support student well-being.
- IV. By prioritizing guidance and counselling in Nigerian schools, we can support the academic and personal success of our students, fostering a brighter future for Nigeria.
- V. Since the implementation of guidance and counselling programmes is needed to achieve the goals of secondary education, the government should provide guidance and counselling unit in all public secondary schools and should mandate owners of private schools to do so.
- VI. The counselling unit should be equipped with modern guidance and counselling facilities, which include television, radio, computer (desktop and laptop), cassette, CDs, printer, projector, journals, magazines, notice board, suggestion board, tables and chairs, shelving for keeping and retrieving of students' folders.
- VII. Counselling services such as referral, vocational, information, career and placement, and evaluation should be provided for students in school.

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