

Guidance and Counselling Services and Mental Well-Being of Individuals with Special Needs in A.A. Raji Special School Sokoto

***¹M.S Nawait & ²Asma'u Mustapha**

^{*1&2}Department of Counselling Psychology, Sokoto State University, Sokoto **Email:** muknawait@gmail.com

Abstract

This study investigated the impact of guidance and counselling services on the mental well-being of individuals with special needs in senior secondary schools in Sokoto Metropolis. Two objectives and two hypotheses guided the research. The study adopted a descriptive survey design with a sample of 100 students from A.A Raji Special School through stratified random sampling. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled Guidance and Counselling Services and Mental Well-Being Questionnaire (GCSMWQ) and analyzed using Chi-square tests at 0.05 significance level. Findings revealed that both academic and personal counselling services significantly enhance the mental well-being of students with special needs. Academic counselling was found to reduce academic stress, improve study habits and boost performance, while personal counselling enhanced self-esteem, stress management and emotional adjustment. The study rejected both null hypotheses, confirming a positive relationship between counselling services and mental well-being. However, challenges such as inadequate trained counsellors, insufficient facilities and cultural stigma were noted. The study recommends recruiting more trained counsellors, integrating counselling into inclusive education policies and increasing awareness to reduce stigma. Adequate funding and resource allocation are essential to sustain and improve these services for learners with disabilities.

Keywords: Guidance and Counselling, Mental well-being & Special needs students

Introduction

Education is widely acknowledged as a powerful tool for both personal advancement and national development. However, for students with special needs, the educational experience is often complicated by challenges that go beyond academics to include emotional, psychological, and social concerns. These challenges have created a demand for structured interventions, particularly guidance and counselling services, which play an essential role in supporting students' adjustment and overall mental well-being. According to Egbochuku (2008), the introduction of guidance and counselling into Nigerian schools was designed to provide learners with assistance across academic, vocational, personal, and social domains, thereby helping them cope with the realities of school and life.

Over the years, the scope of school counselling in Nigeria has shifted significantly. Earlier models were focused largely on career guidance, but in response to broader educational and societal demands, counselling has expanded into a comprehensive and developmental framework that encompasses academic support, personal growth, and mental health (Nwachukwu, 2019). This evolution reflects a global recognition of the need to address not just the intellectual but also the psychological needs of learners.

Mental well-being, therefore, has emerged as a central concern. The World Health Organization (2020) defines mental well-being as the state in which individuals are able to realize their potential, cope with everyday stress, and contribute productively to their communities. Mental well-being refers to the state in which individuals can cope with the normal stresses of life, work productively, and contribute to their community (World Health Organization [WHO], 2020). For students with special needs, mental well-being is particularly significant because it influences their ability to engage with learning, maintain social relationships, and develop resilience against stigma and discrimination (Oladipo & Balogun, 2021). In the Nigerian context, poor access to quality educational resources, coupled with the social stigma attached to disability, often undermines the mental well-being of students with special needs (Aliyu & Umar, 2021). This highlights the urgent need for structured interventions such as guidance and counselling to provide emotional support and enhance resilience.

The term "special needs" refers to individuals whose physical, sensory, or cognitive impairments affect their ability to participate fully in educational and

social environments. Heward (2012) highlights the diversity of conditions, including visual, hearing, orthopedic, and neurological impairments. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD, 2016) emphasizes the need for inclusive education to remove barriers and promote equal opportunities. From a social model perspective, Oliver (2016) explains that disability results not only from impairments but from societal and environmental barriers. Hence, individuals with special needs require tailored support, including counselling, to ensure full participation in education.

Academic counselling involves helping students plan and manage their learning activities effectively, including time management, study skills, test preparation, and dealing with learning difficulties (Okeke, 2021). Research indicates that students who receive effective academic counselling demonstrate higher self-confidence, reduced exam anxiety, and improved academic performance (Eyo, Joshua, & Esuong, 2010). For students with special needs, academic counselling is essential in reducing academic pressure and providing strategies tailored to their learning challenges (Onyechi & Okere, 2021). Without such support, these students may experience heightened stress and feelings of inadequacy, which negatively affect their mental well-being (Usman & Salihu, 2019).

Personal counselling focuses on helping students deal with emotional and psychological challenges such as anxiety, low self-esteem, peer pressure, and family-related stress (Nwoye, 2017). Scholars argue that personal counselling provides a safe space for students to express their feelings, develop coping mechanisms, and build resilience (Oladele, 2022).

Several studies have linked personal counselling to improved emotional regulation, greater self-confidence, and better overall mental well-being (Obi, 2020; Adebowale & Dare, 2017). For students with special needs, personal counselling is particularly valuable because they are more likely to face stigma, isolation, and bullying, which can harm their self-concept (Okonkwo, 2020). By addressing these emotional challenges, personal counselling enhances their ability to thrive academically and socially.

Despite these benefits, researchers have highlighted several challenges undermining the effectiveness of school counselling in Nigeria. Uzor (2012) and Oladele (2022) point out that many schools lack adequately trained counsellors and the infrastructure required for effective service delivery.

Counselling units are often underfunded, and programmes remain poorly integrated into school systems. These problems are even more pronounced in northern Nigeria, particularly Sokoto Metropolis, where socio-economic limitations, cultural perceptions of disability, and a shortage of resources impede access to quality counselling services (Yakubu, 2020).

Nevertheless, empirical evidence continues to affirm the importance of guidance and counselling in improving learners' psychological outcomes. For example, Adebowale and Dare (2017) linked counselling services to reductions in anxiety, while Whiston and Sexton (2018) provided global evidence that school-based counselling has measurable impacts on mental health outcomes. These findings highlight the relevance of counselling as both a preventive and developmental service for students with special needs.

Given the unique challenges faced by learners with disabilities in Sokoto Metropolis, there is a pressing need to investigate the extent to which academic and personal counselling services contribute to their mental well-being. While earlier research has established the general benefits of counselling, there remains limited localized evidence in Sokoto. This study, therefore, seeks to address this gap by exploring how academic and personal counselling services influence the mental well-being of students with special needs in senior secondary schools within Sokoto Metropolis.

Statement of the Problem

The research problem focuses on understanding the challenges faced by individuals with special needs in relation to their mental well-being within the educational environment. Many students with physical, sensory, or intellectual impairments encounter social isolation, stigma, and restricted access to appropriate learning supports and facilities. Such barriers increase the risk of anxiety, depression and low self-esteem among affected students. Academic pressures and difficulties with transitions amplify stress when schools lack tailored academic guidance and accommodations. Furthermore, limited availability of trained counselors and inadequate counseling programs mean that students often do not receive timely psychosocial support. Parental and community misconceptions about disability can also restrict help-seeking and reinforce exclusionary attitudes. The cumulative effect of these personal, institutional and social barriers undermines students' capacity to cope, learn and participate fully in school life. Despite policies promoting inclusive

education, practical gaps in implementation and resource allocation persist, creating a disjunction between policy intent and lived experience. This study therefore seeks to investigate how guidance and counseling services provided within senior secondary schools can mitigate these challenges and support the mental well-being of students with special needs. By examining the extent and effectiveness of academic and vocational counseling provision, the research aims to identify specific service shortfalls and actionable improvements needed to enhance students' emotional resilience and academic engagement. Findings will inform school practices, policy adjustments, and strategic allocation of counseling resources soon thereafter.

Objectives of the Study

This study was guided by two specific objectives:

1. To examine the influence of academic counselling services on the mental well-being of students with special needs in Sokoto Metropolis.
2. To examine the influence of personal counselling services on the mental well-being of students with special needs in Sokoto Metropolis.

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested:

H01: There is no significant relationship between academic counselling services and the mental well-being of students with special needs.

H02: There is no significant relationship between personal counselling services and the mental well-being of students with special needs.

Methodology

The research design adopted for this study was the descriptive correlational research design. This design was considered appropriate because it allows data to be collected from a representative sample of a population and enables generalizations to be made about the entire population. The design also provides an avenue for identifying and analyzing relationships between variables. In this case, the study sought to determine the impact of guidance and counseling services on the mental well-being of individuals with special needs in senior secondary schools in Sokoto Metropolis.

The population of the study consisted of all senior secondary school students of A.A. Raji Special School in Sokoto, which caters for students with hearing impairments, visual impairments, physical impairments, and intellectual impairments. The school had a total population of 1,236 students, distributed across SS1, SS2, and SS3 classes.

A sample of 100 students was selected from the population using the stratified random sampling technique to ensure proper representation of students across gender and class levels. This method was employed to give every category of student within the population an equal chance of being selected and to minimize sampling bias.

The main instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire developed by the researcher, titled *Guidance and Counseling Services and Mental Well-being Questionnaire (GCSMWQ)*. The validity and reliability indexes of 0.87 and 0.79 were obtained respectively.

The data analysis was carried out using inferential statistics. Chi-square (χ^2) test of independence was employed to test the formulated hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance. This approach was suitable because it enabled the researcher to determine whether significant associations exist between guidance and counseling services and the mental well-being of individuals with special needs.

Results

The data collected through the questionnaire are presented in tables for analysis, reflecting the impact of guidance and counselling services on mental well-being of individuals with special needs in senior secondary school in Sokoto metropolis, Sokoto state Nigeria. The analysis of the data was divided into two sections: Section A focused on background variables, while Section B addressed data related to guidance and counselling services on mental well-being of individuals with special needs in senior secondary school.

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents According to Level

Gender	Frequency	Percentages (%)
Male	62	62
Female	38	38
Total	100	100

Sources: Field Work, 2025

Table 1 revealed that males made up 62% of the respondents while females made up 38%. This indicated that there were more males than females' respondents in the study. This indicates a slight male dominance in the sample.

Table 2: Distribution of Respondents According to Class Level

Class Level	Frequency	Percentages (%)
SS1	30	30
SS2	40	40
SS3	30	30
Total	100	100

Sources: Field Work, 2025

Table 2 revealed that 30 respondents, representing 30% were in SS 1. 40 respondents, representing 40% were in SS 2, while 30 respondents, representing 30% were in SS 3. This indicated that majority of the respondents were in SS 2.

Table 3: Distribution of Respondents According to Type of Special Need

Type of Special Need	Frequency	Percentages (%)
Hearing Impairment	30	30
Visual Impairment	40	40
Learning Difficulties	30	30
Total	100	100

Table 3 reveals that 30 respondents, representing 30% were Hearing Impaired, while 40 respondents, representing 40% were Visual Impairment and 30 respondents, representing 30% were Learning Difficulties. This implies that most respondents were Visual Impairment and would reflect majority in data gathered which would have salutary effects for the study in producing credible and reliable results.

Analysis of Research Objectives

Objective 1: To examine the influence of academic counselling services on the mental well-being of students with special needs

Table 4: Respondents' Opinions on Academic Counselling Services

Statement	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)
Counsellors help me plan my studies effectively.	40.0	42.1	12.4	5.5
I receive guidance on preparing for examinations.	36.6	44.1	10.3	9.0
Academic counselling reduces my academic stress.	38.6	40.0	12.4	9.0
Counsellors advise me on managing my time.	34.5	42.1	13.1	10.3
I perform better in class due to counselling support.	37.2	40.7	12.4	9.7

Sources: Field Work, 2025

Most respondents agreed that academic counselling services positively support their studies. Over 75% of respondents (combining SA and A) across all items confirmed that counselling helps them plan studies, prepare for exams, manage stress, and improve performance. Only a small proportion (around 9–13%) disagreed, suggesting that academic counselling plays a significant role in reducing stress and enhancing learning among students with special needs.

Objective 2: To examine the influence of personal counselling services on the mental well-being of students with special needs

Table 5: Respondents’ Opinions on Personal Counselling Services

Statement	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)
Personal counselling helps me cope with stress.	41.4	40.0	10.3	8.3
I feel more confident after personal counselling.	44.1	38.6	9.0	8.3
Counsellors help me overcome low self-esteem.	42.1	41.4	9.0	7.5
I share my emotional problems with the counsellor.	38.6	39.3	11.0	11.0
Personal counselling improves my overall mental well-being.	45.5	37.2	9.0	8.3

Sources: Field Work, 2025

A large majority (over 78% of respondents) agreed that personal counselling services improved their stress management, confidence, and emotional well-being. Less than 12% disagreed, showing strong acceptance of personal counselling as a major factor in enhancing psychological resilience of students with special needs.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis One (H01): There is no significant relationship between academic counselling services and the mental well-being of students with special needs

Table 6: Chi-Square Test on Academic Counselling and Mental Well-Being

Response	Observed (O)	Expected (E)	(O-E) ² / E
Agree (SA + A)	77	50	14.58
Disagree (D + SD)	23	50	14.58
Total	100	100	29.16

Sources: Field Work, 2025

At 1.df; significant level of 0.05, critical value is 3.84.

Table 3 shows that there is a significant relationship between academic counselling services and the mental well-being of students with special needs. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected since the calculated value is greater than the critical value (i.e $29.16 > 3.84$).

Hypothesis Two (H02): There is no significant relationship between personal counselling services and the mental well-being of students with special needs.

Table 7: Chi-Square Test on Personal Counselling and Mental Well-Being

Response	Observed (O)	Expected (E)	$(O-E)^2 / E$
Agree (SA + A)	80	50	18.00
Disagree (D + SD)	20	50	18.00
Total	100	100	36.00

Sources: *Field Work, 2025:*

@ 1.df; significant level of 0.05, critical value is 3.84.

Table 4 shows that there is a significant relationship between personal counselling services and the mental well-being of students with special needs. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected since the calculated value is greater than the critical value (i.e $36.00 > 3.84$).

Discussion

The study revealed that both academic and personal counselling services positively and significantly influence the mental well-being of students with special needs in Sokoto Metropolis.

The results indicated that counselling helped students plan their studies, manage time, and cope with academic stress. This finding supports Okeke (2021), who noted that academic counselling reduces anxiety and enhances performance. Similarly, Eyo, Joshua, and Esuong (2010) reported that counselling improved study habits and built self-confidence. These results show that academic guidance provides practical tools for academic success and mental stability.

Personal counselling was found to enhance stress management, self-esteem, and emotional adjustment. This agrees with Adebawale and Dare (2017), who demonstrated that personal counselling reduced anxiety and promoted emotional regulation among Nigerian adolescents. Obi (2020) also emphasized its role in improving students' coping abilities. For students with special needs, this form of counselling is crucial given their higher risk of stigma, discrimination, and isolation (Okonkwo, 2020).

The findings also resonate with Whiston and Sexton (2018), who provided global evidence of counselling's impact on students' mental health. Oladipo and Balogun (2021) similarly noted that psychological well-being directly influences learning outcomes for students with disabilities. By confirming

these associations in Sokoto, this study underscores the universal importance of school counselling.

However, challenges remain. As Uzor (2012) and Yakubu (2020) observed, limited trained counsellors, inadequate infrastructure, and cultural barriers in northern Nigeria hinder effective counselling. Without addressing these systemic issues, the full benefits of counselling may not be realized.

Conclusion

This study concludes that both academic and personal counselling services play a vital role in supporting the mental well-being of students with special needs in Sokoto Metropolis. Academic counselling reduces academic pressure and fosters learning success, while personal counselling enhances emotional resilience, self-confidence, and psychological adjustment. Since both null hypotheses were rejected, the study confirms a strong, positive, and significant relationship between counselling services and mental well-being of students with special needs.

Recommendations

Drawing on the findings and the conclusions made, the following recommendations are made:

3. The schools should employ more trained counsellors and equip units with proper facilities.
4. Counselling services should be mainstreamed into inclusive education policies at both state and federal levels.
5. Parents and communities should be sensitized to reduce stigma and support children's access to counselling.
6. Government should allocate sufficient resources to sustain school counselling programmes and provide assistive tools for learners with disabilities.

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