

Functional Education Without Counselling and Guidance Services: Nigeria at Risk

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Abstract

This paper argues that Guidance and counselling services are essential for achieving functional education in Nigeria. The paper employed a systematic review of literature to highlights the critical gap created by the absence or inadequacy of guidance and counselling services in schools. Functional education equips individuals with relevant, employable skills necessary for personal development and societal contribution. However, without integrated counselling services, students are left unguided in making educational and career choices, contributing to high rates of unemployment, underemployment, and skill mismatches. The paper explores the impact of inadequate counselling on students' career development, academic achievement, and mental health, warning of potential consequences such as increased dropout rates and poor career decisions. The existing literature reveals a significant deficiency in the current education system due to the neglect of guidance services. The paper concludes with practical recommendations for embedding counselling services across all educational levels to support national workforce development. Without urgent reform, Nigeria risks continued economic stagnation and social instability fueled by a generation unprepared to meet the demands of a competency-driven workforce.

Keywords: Career Development, Functional Education, Guidance And Counselling, Nigeria, Unemployment.

Introduction

The importance of functional education in the lives of citizens to equip them with the needed skills, knowledge, and competencies towards their personal development, employment, and contribution to society cannot be overstated. It transcends theoretical instruction but includes practical skills that make one employable, innovative, and relevant in the rapidly changing world. This synthesis of literature aims to explore the current state of guidance and counselling services in Nigerian educational institutions, with a specific focus on the role and importance, challenges, and consequences of the absence of guidance and counselling services in Nigerian schools. The research aim of this synthesis is to identify the gaps in the provision of guidance and counselling services in Nigerian schools and to suggest strategies for improving these services. By investigating the existing literature, this synthesis seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the issues surrounding guidance and counselling services in Nigeria.

Functional education aims at equipping students with functional competencies, information, and values that would propel national progress and global competitiveness. The significance of functional education cannot be overemphasized in the context of the rapidly evolving Nigerian economy. Functional education is not, however, achievable in any educational system without the integration of guidance and counselling services into the system being a recipe for disaster. Guidance and counselling play a crucial role in responding to the personal, academic, and career development of students to be able to meet the challenges in the contemporary workforce and society (Adanna, Agerewe, & Rita, 2023, Adeniran & Adeola, 2021, Eze, 2023).

Guidance and counselling are necessary in shaping students' education and career aspirations. The services involve career counselling on issues to empower students with knowledge and skills to become effective citizens. According to the American School Counsellor Association (2020), school counsellors ensure students' achievement and preparation for life after school. Some literature indicates career counselling as one of the key strategies that may help functionalization of education among students at all levels of education. Ochoa, Rodriguez, and Martinez (2020) investigated the effectiveness of career guidance on job performance and motivation of students from South American technical schools and concluded that students who received individualized career guidance tended to persist in their programmes and excel in job readiness. This is in accord with research conducted by Adebayo (2019), whereby it was evidenced that career advice helps students understand their vocation and connect the skills to what the labour market demands to improve employability on graduation.

Again, due to the on-going fluctuation of the global economy, the need for skilled labour placed a premium on vocational and technical education (VTE). Technical and vocational institutions play a vital role in equipping students with the right competencies and skills. The issue is to make sure that the competencies result in functional education that can stimulate personal development and contribution to society. Counselling strategies have helped significantly in this regard through regards to students' problems in personal, academic, and vocational spheres. Giving credence to this assertion a study by Nwankwo and Okechukwu (2021) assessed the impact of psycho-social counselling interventions on the academic performances and self-esteem of technical school students. The results of this study revealed that effective education is enhanced with guidance and counselling services which will assist in catering for the mental health and self-concept of students; improve students' academic concentration and functionality socially.

In line with this finding, Wilson, Karani and Adeola, (2022) reported that counselling, based on emotional intelligence and resilience training, had a positive effect on the degree of students' adaptability in response to academic and personal issues; thus, enhancing their overall growth as well as skills acquisition through Counselling which is the main goal of guidance and counselling in functional education.

The paper views the lack of holistic guidance and counselling services in Nigeria's education system as a looming danger to the future wealth of Nigeria, since it further aggravates an

already high rate of unemployment, underemployment, social unrest, and skill mismatch. Functional education seeks to meet both the individual's and society's needs. Functional education provides the individual with critical thinking abilities, problem-solving abilities, and technical expertise to function properly in complex socio-economic environments, (Adeniran et al, 2021). Correspondingly, functional education is required in Nigeria, where the greater proportion of its population consists of youths, in order to activate its human resource base effectively. But functional education cannot work without some kind of support; it needs to be supported by guidance and counselling that helps students connect what they do at school to personal and career aspirations.

Problem Statement and Positioning

Education is the foundation of national development, but in Nigeria's functional education system, without proper Guidance and Counselling (G&C) services, all is in jeopardy. Functional education seeks to equip learners with capabilities, knowledge, and values for self-reliance, national development, and global competitiveness. Without organized G&C services, however, learners face serious problems like poor career choices, low motivation, emotional disturbance, and increased social vices, all of which subvert the effectiveness of education in serving national ends. There ought to be a functional education system that equips individuals to become productive members of society, but most students in Nigeria are grappling with career mismatch, resulting in high levels of unemployment and underemployment. Lack of professional career guidance means students will end up following courses that may not be consistent with their aptitudes or employment market needs. Likewise, a lack of psychological and social counselling exposes students to academic failure, mental health crises, and problems of behaviour. Besides, Nigeria's socio-economic challenges of high school dropout, drug abuse, cultism, and examination malpractice underscore the imperative of integrating comprehensive G&C services in schools. Guidance counsellors are expected to overcome learning difficulties, self-discipline, social responsibility, and shape students to make sound moral decisions. The lack of these services creates a vacuum in education, which compromises national development and stability.

Research Gap and Aim

Despite the overwhelming need for Guidance and Counselling (G&C) services in educational systems globally, a significant gap exists in their implementation within Nigerian schools. Studies indicate that approximately 93% of schools in Nigeria lack dedicated career counsellors, leaving students without essential support for academic and career development. This deficiency contributes to prevalent issues such as poor career choices, low motivation, and increased engagement in social vices among students. While existing literature underscores the benefits of G&C services, there is a paucity of research focusing on the direct correlation between the absence of these services and the rising rates of unemployment, underemployment, and skill mismatches in Nigeria. This study aims to

bridge this gap by examining the critical role of G&C services in achieving functional education and how their absence jeopardizes national development objectives.

Methodology

The study employed a systematic review of literature designed to investigate the impact of functional education without guidance and counselling services on students in Nigeria. The systematic review provided a comprehensive overview of the existing literature. Peer-reviewed articles, conference papers and dissertations were used. Data synthesis involved a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods to synthesize the findings from multiple studies investigating the impact of functional guidance and counselling services on students in Nigeria. Studies that do not investigate the impact of functional education without guidance and counselling services on students in Nigeria were excluded. A comprehensive search strategy was employed to identify relevant studies such as keywords, search terms, hand searching and electronic-databases such as Google scholar, web of science, Scopus, research-gate and others. The study followed this methodology to provide a comprehensive and systematic review of the impact of functional education without guidance and counseling services on students in Nigeria.

Synthesis of Literature Review

A critical analysis of the interface between functional education and guidance and counselling (G&C) service delivery in Nigeria establishes a large deficiency in the current education system.

Functional education aims to equip learners with functional skills and knowledge to achieve independence, positive contribution to society, and global competitiveness. But experts affirm that Nigeria's education system is gravely under threat from the poor implementation of Guidance and Counselling (G&C) services, which are a vital component in students' academic, career, and psychosocial growth.

The Role of Guidance and Counselling in Functional Education

Various studies identify the role of G&C in the attainment of functional education. Ogunode, Attah, and Ebute (2023) reveal that guidance and counselling allow the student to make informed career choices, gain problem-solving skills, and develop emotional stability. Similarly, David, Ohunene, and Ogunode (2021) suggest that effectively planned G&C programmes enhance students' self-concept, decision-making, and coping with societal changes which are central components of functional education.

With no career guidance and counselling services, students experience career and academic mismatches, and their figures in unemployment and underemployment increase (Obiorah, 2022). According to studies by Adanna, Agerewe, and Rita (2023), where career guidance is absent, students take courses as a result of peer pressure or parental influence rather than their aptitude and interest. This leads to mismatches that result in a labour market with few skills for national development (Yufus et al, 2020).

Literature has often resonated that counselling has an important role to play in the context of vocational and technical schools in a bid to further enhance students' career development and academic achievement.

Gbenu and Taiwo (2016) argue that career guidance services have an irreplaceable role to play in assisting students in navigating the intricate processes of career decision-making in relation to labour market demands and their goals. New research identifies counselling as a vital avenue for the acquisition of soft skills to complement technical skills. Shumba and Dhlamini (2017) acknowledge that incorporating communication, teamwork, and leadership skills in the counselling curriculum will render technical education more functional in general. These are skills needed to facilitate an easy transition from school to the workplace. This is echoed by a parallel opinion by Eze and Uwa (2023), who affirmed that problem-solving and critical thinking skills developed by counselling services significantly contributed to enhanced innovation and flexibility among VTE students. In the view of Okoro et al (2018), such skills are crucial in contemporary industries revolutionizing at a mind-boggling pace, thus providing the basis for effective education needed in addressing the needs of individuals and society.

A critical analysis of the literature reveals that guidance and counselling services are essential for students' academic, social and emotional development (Adeyemo, 2014, Olowo, 2017). These services help students navigate academic challenges, develop life skills, and make informed decisions about their future. However, a comparative analysis of studies reveals that the effectiveness of guidance and counselling services in Nigerian schools is hindered by several challenges.

Challenges in Setting Counselling Strategies in Nigerian Schools

Despite the benefits, various challenges hinder effective implementation of counselling strategies in Nigerian schools. A comprehensive review of literature reveals that Nigerian educational institutions face several challenges in providing guidance and counselling services. Some of the key challenges include:

1. Insufficient finance is a limiting factor in the establishment and maintenance of G&C units, which also affect the provision of essential materials and resources for effective counselling. Many schools lack the resources to establish and maintain G&C services (Afolabi, 2018). This is consistent with findings from other studies that highlight the need for increased funding to support guidance and counselling services (Ogunleye, 2019, Kennedy, 2024)
2. Inadequate trained personnel is a major challenge as schools lack sufficient trained counsellors, because there is poor manpower planning and a shortage of enough training institutions with specialized courses in guidance and counselling, (Adewuyi & Adedayo, 2020, Adeniran et al, 2021). This is also consistent with the submission of Ogunleye, (2019), who averred that shortage of trained counsellors in Nigerian schools limits the effectiveness of guidance and counselling services. This is a critical issue that needs to be addresses through targeted training programmes.

3. Inadequate Infrastructure is lacking in most schools, they lack proper spaces and infrastructures for conducting counselling sessions, which presents a barrier to the delivery of privacy-focused and effective services, (Adeyemo, 2014, Kennedy, 2024). This highlights the need for investments in infrastructure to support guidance and counselling services.
4. Negative Attitudes and Awareness, most schools lack awareness and understanding of the significance of G&C services among students, parents, and even educators, leading to underutilization and low uptake of such services, (David et al, 2021, Adewuyi et al 2020, Akinwumi, 2019, Nnaji, et al 2021),
5. Lack of Institutional support, literature indicates that poor implementation of educational policies has led to the non-execution of mandatory counselling services in most schools, (Ogunode et al, 2023 and Adanna et al, 2023). This is consistent with Awujo, Kennedy and Alor, (2012) who revealed that administrative deterrents impair the proper functioning of guidance services in some schools as most administrators assign teaching roles to counsellors instead of providing them the necessary facilities to practice. This places a crippling limitation to counselling services in schools. Comparatively, literature reveals that these challenges pose several consequences on the students in Nigerian educational institutions.

The Consequences of Functional Education Without Guidance and Counselling

Without guidance and counselling services, the Nigerian education system is likely to produce graduates poorly prepared for the labour market. In their absence, the following consequences will persist:

1. High Unemployment and Underemployment Rates

Nigeria's unemployment rate was at 33.3% in 2021, and youth unemployment was a staggering 53.4% (National Bureau of Statistics, 2021). Some of the key causes include the mismatch between school-gained skills and those demanded by industry. Counselling bridges the gap by making the students familiar with developments in the labour market, thereby allowing them to choose their studies and career with an understanding of what the labour market demands.

2. Incongruent Skills

Failure by schools to provide career guidance has resulted in graduates entering the labour market unable to cope with its demands. Nigerian graduates are theoretically sound but not provided with practical skills required to get employment, as posited by Eze (2023).

3. Increased Dropout Rates

Students drop out of school due to personal problems, lack of money, or poor academic performance (Ogunleye, 2019), Counselling can provide intervention and assistance to counter such problems. This is in line with the findings from other studies like Olowo, (2017)

and Okoro (2018) who attributed poor academic performance and drop out to lack of access to guidance and counselling services. This highlights the importance of counselling services for academic success.

4. Psychosocial Challenges and Mental Health Problems

The absence of counselling services offers room for students to grow into anxiety, depression, and other mental health problems. Counselling provides a forum where students can speak themselves out and receive emotional support (Afolabi, 2018, (Ogunode et al., 2023.).

5. Lack of Career Development

Career guidance is required to help students develop realistic goals and acquire the appropriate skills to achieve them. Without career guidance, students are most likely to make inappropriate career decisions leading to job dissatisfaction and insecurity.

Scholars are in agreement that the absence of strong G&C services invalidates the applicability and quality of Nigeria's education system that adversely affects many aspects of effective education, (Adanna et al., 2023). The absence of well-organized career counselling results in a workforce unprepared for the economic needs of Nigeria.

6. Rising Social Vices, studies indicate that there is a correlation between poor guidance services and increased cases of drug abuse, cultism, and examination malpractice among students without access to counselling services students are at higher risk of emotional issues, social adjustment issues, and engagement in undesirable behaviours such as substance abuse and academic misconduct (Nwafor & Ugochukwu, 2022).

A critical analysis of literature reveals several gaps in the provision of guidance and counselling services in Nigerian school. Some of the key gaps include;

- i. Lack of research on the effectiveness of guidance and counselling services, this suggests the need for more research on the effectiveness of guidance and counselling services in Nigerian schools to inform policy and practice.
- ii. Limited understanding of social and emotional needs of students. There is need for more research on the role G&C services play on the social and emotional needs of students in Nigerian schools to inform the development of comprehensive G&C services.
- iii. Insufficient attention to the role of G&C services in promoting academic success. There is a dare need for more research to emphasize the crucial role of G&C services in students' academic journey.

Conclusion

To revamp Nigeria's education system and ensure it produces graduates capable of driving economic growth, urgent policy reforms are needed to embed functional guidance and counselling services at all levels. Their integration is critical to addressing youth

unemployment, skills mismatch, and social instability. Education stakeholders, government agencies, and industries must act swiftly to institutionalize counselling as a core component of educational policy and practice, ensuring that Nigerian youths are prepared for the demands of the 21st-century workforce.

Recommendations by Scholars

In order to counteract these risks, scholars recommended a number of proposals such as, Increased Funding and Policy Implementation should be given priority for the government and educational stakeholders to focus on funding and implementation of G&C services (David et al., 2021).

Professional counsellor training and deployment is suggested by Ogunode et al. (2023) for the expansion of counsellor education programmes and inclusion of G&C services in schools as a mandate.

Public Awareness Campaigns, Adanna et al. (2023) suggest sensitization campaigns to change attitudes towards the role of G&C in education.

In order to protect Nigeria's operational education system, the government needs to give high priority to the complete implementation of G&C services in all education levels. To reduce the risk of running functional education without guidance and counselling services, the following are suggested:

1. Counselling services in all schools, there should be mandatory comprehensive guidance and counselling services in all school by recruiting and training professional counsellors to meet manpower needs.
2. Recruitment and training of professional counsellors, Schools have to recruit professionally trained and certified counsellors and ensure their continuous development.
3. Public awareness campaigns initiating public awareness campaigns to raise awareness of the contribution of G&C to education among stakeholders with a view to informing students, parents, and teachers of the advantages of counselling to alter negative attitudes and foster active engagement.
4. Strengthening School-Industry Links, schools should forge links with industries to equip students with current labour market information.
5. Forcing the government to make policies that will ensure G&C services in schools. Guidance and counselling services have been considered long enough in the country's education policy statement but governments lack the determination to turn it into practice, forcing this policy will make education effective. Professional counselling associations like Association of Professional Counsellors in Nigeria (APROCON) and Counselling Association of Nigeria (CASSON) should mount pressure on relevant bodies to establish G&C services in Nigerian schools.
6. Infrastructure development should be priorities to provide adequate funding and infrastructure for counselling programmes by providing separate spaces and

facilities in schools and colleges to facilitate confidential and efficient counselling sessions.

Lacking these interventions, Nigeria loses otherwise well-trained but adequately less empowered graduates with requisite life skills, emotional quotients, and professional preparation to nation building. Effective education must keep pace with productive G&C services if they are to provide suitably capable pupils who will appropriately meet the demands of resolving individual, school-related, and vocational challenges facing society today and the world in the future.

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