

STRATEGIES FOR COMPREHENSIVE COUNSELLING CURRICULUM: FRAMEWORK FOR SCHOOL GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING PROGRAMME

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Abstract

This paper discussed on the strategies to be followed in ensuring comprehensive counselling curriculum thereby presenting a framework for school guidance and counselling programme that can be used in a school setting. In Nigerian context, the National Policy on Education recognises the place of guidance and counselling programme in schools and the programme can be used as catalyst towards ensuring the goals of education. The discussion posit that the central aim of school guidance and counselling programme is to provide series of interventions to students. It is evidenced that counselling programme focused on academic, career, and personal development of the students. The curriculum aims to address the holistic needs of students, equipping them with essential life skills, career awareness, and emotional intelligence. Preventive, developmental, intervention, and remedial approaches were recommended through incorporating guidance lessons, workshops, and individual counselling sessions. Full implementation of this curriculum can improve students' academic performance, career readiness, and emotional well-being, ultimately contributing to a more informed, skilled, and resilient as well as effective workforce production in Nigeria. The paper concluded that developing a structured school counselling curriculum within the Nigerian education system is essential for fostering students' academic success, career readiness, and emotional well-being leading to individual and national development. Suggestion toward prioritising production and training of school counsellors was proffered for the government as well as the policy makers to take in to consideration. Colleges and Universities need to intensify mode of counselling training to cater for the need of the manpower.

Keywords: Counselling Curriculum, school, guidance and counselling Programme.

Introduction

School counselling is an essential component of the educational system in Nigeria aimed at enhancing students' academic performance, career aspirations, and social well-being. With the increasing complexities in students' lives, including

socio-economic pressures, peer influence, career uncertainties, and mental health concerns, it is crucial to establish a well-structured counselling curriculum that provides the necessary support and intervention in order to rescue the prevailing situation. The goal of this counselling curriculum is to equip students with skills and knowledge that foster personal growth, resilience, and informed decision-making. The National Policy on Education (2014) recognises the significance of counselling services in schools and mandates that schools should integrate guidance and counselling into their educational programmes. However, the implementation has been inconsistent due to the presence of many factors such as a lack of trained counsellors, insufficient funding, and limited awareness of the benefits of counselling programme (Bukoye, 2010). It is open as well justifiable that many schools, especially in rural areas, lack full-time professional counsellors, leaving students without adequate support to navigate their academic and personal challenges.

Developing a structured school counselling curriculum that aligns with Nigeria's educational framework is vital for addressing these issues. The proposed curriculum will provide a roadmap for incorporating academic, career, and socio-emotional counselling services. A well-implemented counselling programme ensures that students develop essential life skills, make informed career decisions, and improve their overall mental well-being through coping and adjustment skills.

The importance of school counselling cannot be overstated, especially in light of the rising mental health concerns among Nigerian students. According to the World Health Organisation (2022), approximately 10-20% of children and adolescents worldwide experience some mental health challenges, with the burden of mental health issues steadily increasing in Nigeria. These challenges are often compounded by societal stigma, limited access to professional mental health services, and the pressure to meet academic expectations. In such an environment, school counselling can play a crucial role in identifying early signs of distress, thereby providing preventive interventions, and promoting emotional well-being.

Effective counselling services can also mitigate the effects of external factors such as poverty, family instability, and societal expectations, which contribute to stress and anxiety among students (Adeniyi, 2019).

In addition to addressing mental health and emotional well-being, school counselling programmes in Nigeria should also focus on career guidance and preparation. With the dynamic and competitive job market, students require comprehensive career support to make informed decisions about their future. Career counselling can help students assess their strengths, interests, and abilities, allowing them to choose careers that align with their skills and aspirations. Moreover, a well-structured career counselling programme can reduce the high rate of career indecision, job dissatisfaction and unemployment, a growing concern in Nigeria (Oladipo & Akinlabi, 2021). Through exposure to various professions, mentorship opportunities, and vocational trainings, students can gain a clearer understanding of their career pathways, thereby enhancing their employability and contributing to the nation's economic growth.

Goals and Objectives of the Counselling Curriculum

The primary aim of the counselling curriculum is to provide holistic support for students, addressing their academic, career, and personal development needs through provision of some activities. School counselling should not be limited to students with difficulties; instead, it should be a proactive and developmental process that benefits all students. According to Gesinde (2017), an effective counselling curriculum fosters self-awareness, problem-solving skills, and resilience among students. Some of these objectives include the followings.

i. Enhancing Academic Success

One of the key objectives of the counselling curriculum is to improve students' academic performance and learning strategies. Many Nigerian students struggle with poor study habits, test anxiety, drug abuse and lack of motivation, which affect their academic outcomes (Enakpoya, 2009). The counselling curriculum should incorporate programmes on study techniques, time management, academic goal-

setting, and stress management strategies. These skills will help students develop a positive attitude toward learning and enhance their overall academic achievement.

Additionally, the curriculum should address learning difficulties and special needs education. Many students face cognitive and learning challenges such as dyslexia, Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and memory retention problems, which often go unnoticed due to a lack of awareness. Therefore, school counsellors should work closely with teachers and parents to identify and support students with special educational needs. According to Oye, Obi & Mohd (2012), integrating academic guidance into school curricula significantly improves students' learning experiences and performance.

ii. Promoting Career Development and Employability Skills

Another crucial objective of the counselling curriculum is to equip students with career awareness and employability skills. Many secondary school students in Nigeria complete their education without a clear understanding of the available career opportunities or the required qualifications for a certain career (Omoegun, 2015). Counsellors should introduce students to career exploration programmes, vocational guidance, and mentorship initiatives to help them make informed decisions.

Furthermore, entrepreneurship education should be a vital component of the curriculum. Given the high unemployment rate in Nigeria, students should be encouraged to explore self-employment opportunities, vocational skills training, and financial literacy programs. Counsellors should collaborate with industry professionals to expose students to diverse career pathways beyond traditional white-collar jobs.

iii. Supporting Personal and Social Development

The counselling curriculum should also focus on students' personal and emotional well-being. Adolescents face numerous challenges, including peer pressure, bullying, low self-esteem, and mental health concerns, which impact their ability to perform academically and socially (Omoegun, 2015). The curriculum

should include programmes that address self-awareness, emotional intelligence, conflict resolution, and relationship management.

Mental health awareness should also be emphasised in the counselling curriculum. Schools should provide counselling sessions, peer support groups, and mental health education to help students cope with emotional challenges. According to Akinade (2012) integrating mental health support into school counselling services reduces student dropout rates and enhances overall well-being.

Framework for the School Counselling Programme

A well-structured school counselling programme should be based on a comprehensive framework that addresses students' academic, career, and socio-emotional needs. The framework should follow a preventive, developmental, intervention, and remedial approaches to ensure that students receive the necessary support at different stages of their education.

1. Preventive Counselling

Preventive counselling focuses on creating awareness and educating students on potential challenges before they arise. This approach includes orientation, workshops, school-wide awareness campaigns, and mentorship programmes on topics such as time management, drug abuse prevention, peer pressure, and mental health awareness (Kochhar, 2007). According to Nwachukwu (2016) preventive counselling reduces risky behaviours among adolescents and improves decision-making skills.

For instance, workshops on anti-bullying strategies can help students develop conflict resolution skills and create a more inclusive school environment. Similarly, mental health awareness programs can reduce the stigma around seeking help for psychological issues and encourage students to seek support early (Zango; Abdullahi and Bello, 2012).

2. Developmental Counselling

Developmental counselling is an ongoing process that focuses on academic, career and social development. This includes career guidance sessions, personality

assessments, leadership training and skill-building workshops. Developmental counselling should be integrated into the school curriculum through guidance lessons, peer mentoring programmes, and extracurricular activities. For example, students can participate in career fairs excursions, industry visits, and job shadowing programmes to gain firsthand experience in different career fields. Ikeotuonye (2017) suggests that structured career guidance programs enhance students' career readiness and improve their transition into higher education and the workforce.

3. Intervention and Remedial Counselling

Intervention and remedial counselling focus on addressing specific challenges that students face, such as academic difficulties, emotional trauma, family problems, and behavioural issues. This approach involves individual counselling, group therapy, crisis intervention, and referrals to professional psychological services when necessary (Eyo *et al.*, 2020).

For example, students experiencing grief, abuse, or anxiety disorders may require personalised counselling sessions to help them cope with their situations. Schools should have qualified counsellors trained in crisis intervention techniques to provide the necessary support. According to Eyo *et al.* (2020) intervention counselling significantly improves students' emotional stability and academic performance.

Components of the Counselling Curriculum

A well-structured school counselling curriculum should cover three main domains: academic development, career development, and personal/social development (Oye, Obi, & Mohd, 2012). These domains address the holistic needs of students and equip them with the necessary tools to thrive academically and personally.

a. Academic Development

Academic development focuses on enhancing students' learning experiences and improving their educational outcomes. Counsellors should provide guidance on study techniques, time management, and academic goal setting. Many Nigerian

students face exam anxiety and poor study habits, which can be mitigated through structured interventions such as orientations, workshops and one-on-one coaching sessions. In another vein, Ejike (2017) emphasise that academic guidance significantly improves students' motivation and learning outcomes through stimulating classroom environment That provides motivation for the students to learn. Additionally, the counselling curriculum should address learning difficulties and special needs education. Many students struggle with learning disabilities such as dyslexia and attention deficit disorders, which often go undiagnosed due to the lack of awareness in Nigerian schools (Oye, Obi, and Mohd, 2012). A proper counselling framework should identify and support students with special learning needs by providing individualised strategies for academic success.

Furthermore, academic development should include career-oriented subject selection. In Nigeria, many students make uninformed choices regarding their subject combinations, leading to mismatched in career aspirations. School counsellors should provide career guidance sessions that help students understand the implications of their subject choices on future career opportunities.

b. Career Development

Career development is a crucial aspect of the counselling curriculum, ensuring that students are well-prepared for life after school. Many Nigerian students lack access to career guidance resources and mentorship opportunities, leading to poor career decisions (Ikeotuonye, 2017). The curriculum should introduce students to various career pathways, vocational training, and entrepreneurship opportunities. One essential component is career exploration and skill-building. Students should be exposed to different professions through career fairs, job shadowing programmes, and mentorship initiatives. Schools should collaborate with industries and professionals to provide real-world exposure to students. According to Ikeotuonye (2017) career education in schools helps students make informed career decisions and improves their employability skills. Additionally, career guidance should focus on entrepreneurship education. With

Nigeria's high unemployment rate, it is essential to equip students with business development skills, financial literacy, and innovation strategies. Counsellors should encourage students to explore self-employment and vocational skills as alternative career paths.

c. Personal and Social Development

Students face numerous social and emotional challenges that can impact their overall well-being. The counselling curriculum should address issues such as mental health awareness, peer relationships, conflict resolution, and bullying prevention. Counsellors should conduct workshops and counselling sessions that help students develop emotional intelligence, self-awareness, and stress management skills thereby enhancing their values and value orientation (Gladys & Bethel, 2022).

Mental health awareness is critical, as many students suffer from depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem without adequate support. According to Omoegun (2015) lack of proper mental health support in schools contributes to high dropout rates and poor academic performance. Schools should integrate mental health education into the curriculum to reduce stigma and encourage students to seek help when needed.

Another critical area is relationship and peer counselling. Adolescents often struggle with social pressures and interpersonal conflict, which can affect their emotional well-being (Olusakin & Aremu, 2010). Counsellors should provide guidance on healthy friendships, emotional boundaries, and effective communication. Through group counselling and peer mediation programs, students can develop positive social interactions.

Implementation Strategies for the Counselling Curriculum

i) Training and Capacity Building for School Counsellors

A major challenge in Nigeria's education system is the shortage of qualified school counsellors (Omoegun, 2015). Many schools either lack professional counsellors or rely on teachers with little or no counselling training or the school counsellors are given another task to undertake which militate against their primary responsibility

(Akinade, Sokan and Osarenren, 2005). To ensure the effective implementation of the curriculum, the government and educational institutions should invest in training and professional development programmes for counsellors. Workshops, certification courses, and partnerships with professional counselling organizations such as the Counselling Association of Nigeria (CASSON) can help enhance the capacity of school counsellors. Additionally, continuous professional development (CPD) programmes should be introduced to keep counsellors updated on modern counselling techniques and strategies.

ii) Collaboration with Teachers, Parents and the Community

Effective counselling programmes require collaboration among teachers, parents and the larger community. Teachers should be trained to identify students in need of counselling and refer them to school counsellors. Parental involvement is also crucial, as parents play a significant role in supporting their children's personal and academic development. Schools should organise parent-teacher-counsellor forums to discuss students' progress and challenges.

iii) Use of Technology in Counselling

With the increasing reliance on technology, schools should explore the use of online counselling platforms, mobile apps, and virtual career guidance tools. Digital counselling resources can help reach more students, especially those in remote areas with limited access to professional counsellors.

Conclusion

Developing a structured school counselling curriculum within the Nigerian education system is essential for fostering students' academic success, career readiness, and emotional well-being. A comprehensive counselling programme that integrates preventive, developmental, intervention and remedial counselling will provide students with the necessary guidance to navigate academic challenges, make informed career decisions and develop resilience in the face of personal and social difficulties. By incorporating essential components such as study skills

development, career exploration, mental health awareness and personal growth workshops, schools can create a supportive environment that enhances students' overall well-being. Additionally, training and capacity building for counsellors, collaboration with parents and teachers and the use of technology will further strengthen the effectiveness of the counselling curriculum.

Despite the challenges facing school counselling programmes in Nigeria, such as shortage of trained counsellors, limited funding, and societal misconceptions about counselling, still strategic policies and investments in counselling services can bridge these gaps. The government, educational stakeholders, and counselling organisations must work together to ensure that every school has a functional and well-equipped counselling programme that caters for students' diverse needs. By prioritising school counselling as a fundamental aspect of the educational framework, Nigeria can produce well-rounded, mentally resilient, and career-ready individuals who can contribute positively to society. The implementation of a well-structured counselling curriculum will not only improve students' personal development but also enhance the overall quality of education in the country.

Suggestion

To ensure the effective implementation of a structured school counselling curriculum in Nigeria, several strategic measures must be taken. Firstly, the government and policymakers should prioritise the production and recruitment and training of professional school counsellors. Many schools, especially in rural areas, lack qualified personnel to provide counselling services. To neutralize this problem, the government should allocate adequate funding for training programmes, certification courses, and continuous professional development initiatives for school counsellors. Additionally, universities and teacher training institutions should integrate counselling education into their curricula to equip future educators with fundamental counselling skills.

Secondly, schools should foster collaboration among teachers, parents, and community stakeholders to create a supportive environment for students. Teachers

should be trained to recognise signs of academic challenges, emotional distress and behavioural issues among students and refer them to counsellors for intervention. Parents should also be actively involved in counselling programmes by attending workshops and participating in decision-making processes that affect their children's academic and personal development. Furthermore, partnerships with mental health professionals, industry experts, and non-governmental organisations can enhance career guidance and mental health support for students.

Lastly, the integration of technology into school counselling services can expand access to guidance and support, especially for students in underserved areas. Online counselling platforms, mobile apps and virtual mentorship programmes can complement traditional face-to-face counselling by providing students with resources and professional advice at their convenience. Schools should invest in digital tools that facilitate career exploration, academic advising, and mental health awareness. By leveraging technology, counselling services can reach a wider audience, thereby ensuring that every student receives the necessary guidance to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.

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