

Ensuring Access, Equity and Quality of Guidance and Counselling Education amidst Insecurity in Nigeria: Challenges and Strategic Interventions

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Abstract

This paper examines the critical issue of, access, equity and quality of guidance and counseling education amidst Nigeria's insecurity crisis, particularly in the context of ongoing security challenges such as insurgency and banditry. The increasing levels of insecurity have disrupted the delivery of counselling services and education, which are essential for the personal, academic, and career development of students. The paper explores the impact of insecurity on curriculum implementation, safety concerns for both counsellors and students, and funding challenges. It also suggests quality assurance measures, including the integration of online platforms, community engagement, and the use of technology for remote supervision, to sustain the effectiveness of counselling education and services. The discussion emphasizes the urgent need to address these challenges to ensure that counselling education remains accessible, equitable, and of high quality, despite the ongoing insecurity.

Keywords: Equity, Access, Quality, Counselling Education, Insecurity, Nigeria, Online Platforms, Community Engagement

Introduction

Guidance and counselling education plays a crucial role in fostering the personal, social, academic, and career development of individuals, particularly students. In Nigeria, the increasing complexity of societal challenges—such as rapid technological advancements, economic shifts, socio-cultural changes, and rising insecurity—has underscored the need for professional support systems that promote mental well-being and academic success. For instance, recent data reveals that between 2014 and 2022, over 1,500 students were abducted in Nigeria due to school attacks, with more than 60% of these incidents occurring in the northern region (Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack [GCPEA], 2023). Additionally, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2022) reports that over 10 million Nigerian children are out of school, largely due to insecurity and displacement. These statistics highlight the urgent need for guidance and counselling services to address the psychological trauma and educational disruptions faced by students. Educational institutions, being primary environments for youth development, are ideal settings for the implementation of effective guidance and counselling services. These services not only assist students in navigating academic pressures but also provide a platform for addressing emotional and psychological concerns (Olayemi, 2017). Theoretical frameworks such as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Super's Career Development Theory provide a robust foundation for understanding the role of guidance and counselling in addressing students' needs.

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Maslow's theory emphasizes the importance of addressing basic needs, such as safety and belonging, before students can achieve self-actualization and academic success (Maslow, 1943). Similarly, Super's theory highlights the importance of career guidance in helping students navigate developmental stages and make informed career decisions (Super, 1957). Moreover, with the rising demand for career readiness and decision-making skills, it is evident that the integration of guidance and counselling into the educational curriculum is vital for preparing students for the dynamic demands of the future workforce (Afolabi & Adebayo, 2019). In the Nigerian context, this aspect of education is fundamental in ensuring that students have the support necessary to thrive in a complex, often stressful environment. Thus, the importance of guidance and counselling in Nigeria's educational system cannot be overstated, as it significantly influences the overall development and success of the nation.

Current State of Insecurity in Nigeria: Effects on Educational Institutions

In Nigeria, insecurity has a long-standing history, marked by conflicts and violence that have affected various aspects of societal life, particularly education. One of the most prominent security threats in recent times has been the insurgency carried out by the extremist group, Boko Haram, which has been active since 2009. The group, whose name roughly translates to "Western education is forbidden," had targeted educational institutions, resulting in the abduction of students and the destruction of schools, particularly in the northern part of Nigeria. This has led to the closure of many schools and a significant disruption in educational activities (Pate, 2018). More recently, banditry has emerged as another severe security threat across Nigeria, particularly in the northwest and central regions. Armed groups have been involved in abductions, killings, and attacks on schools, further exacerbating the challenges of education in affected areas. In 2021 alone, dozens of schools were attacked, and hundreds of students were kidnapped for ransom (Mustapha & Ibrahim, 2021). These acts of violence have intensified fears and discouraged enrollment, especially in rural and conflict-prone regions. The effects of this persistent insecurity on Nigeria's educational institutions are profound. Students live in constant fear, and many are unable to attend schools regularly, particularly in the northern and northwestern regions. Educational facilities have also been damaged or destroyed, leading to a lack of infrastructure for teaching and learning. Teachers and educational staff face the threat of violence, which impacts their ability to deliver quality education. Consequently, the nation is witnessing an increase in educational disparities, as those in conflict-affected areas face challenges in accessing education (Agbu, 2019). Furthermore, the psychological toll on students who are exposed to such violence cannot be understated, as many face trauma, stress, and a disruption of their academic goals. In response, the Nigerian government and various stakeholders have initiated several measures to improve security in schools, such as the establishment of school safety initiatives and collaborations with international organizations. However, the persistence of these security challenges continues to undermine educational development, highlighting the urgent need for a comprehensive and sustained effort to address the root causes of insecurity in the country (Adebayo & Oyedepo, 2020).

Challenges Facing Guidance & Counselling Services amidst Insecurity in Nigeria

The increasing levels of insecurity in Nigeria, largely driven by insurgency, kidnapping, communal clashes, and other forms of violence, have had profound impacts on the educational sector. Guidance and counselling services, which are essential for supporting the psychological, emotional, and academic well-being of students, have faced numerous challenges due to the escalating security concerns. These challenges are manifest in disruptions to curriculum implementation, safety issues for both counsellors and students, and financial constraints that hinder the effective delivery of these services. This paper explores these challenges and their implications for guidance and counselling services in Nigerian schools.

Impact on Curriculum Implementation

Insecurity significantly disrupts the implementation of guidance and counselling services within Nigerian schools. According to Akinmoladun and Olowookere (2020), schools in conflict zones, particularly in the northeastern and north-central regions of Nigeria, face constant interruptions that affect the regular scheduling and delivery of counselling programs. Teachers and counsellors are often unable to carry out their planned sessions due to insecurity-related school closures, evacuation orders, and displacement of students and staff. The lack of a stable environment for learning and personal development also affects students' engagement with counselling services, which can directly undermine their emotional and psychological growth. Furthermore, security concerns have led to the postponement or cancellation of extracurricular activities, including workshops, seminars, and outreach programs designed to support students' mental health (Okunola & Ayodele, 2019). These disruptions leave students vulnerable, especially those who are already struggling with the effects of trauma caused by the ongoing insecurity in their communities.

Safety Concerns for Counsellors and Students

The safety of both counsellors and students is a paramount concern in regions of Nigeria affected by insecurity. In many cases, counsellors are either forced to abandon their duties or take extra precautions to avoid exposure to danger. For instance, some counsellors have reported being threatened by armed groups, and this has led to a decrease in their willingness to engage in

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counselling services (Eze, 2021). For students, the threat of abductions or attacks while attending school creates an atmosphere of fear and apprehension, making it difficult for them to access counselling services. The fear of potential violence often discourages students from participating in counselling sessions, as they prioritize their safety over seeking support. Additionally, insecurity disrupts the safe spaces that schools are supposed to provide, leaving students without a reliable support system in the face of academic or personal difficulties (Fagbemi, 2020).

Funding Issues

Another significant challenge faced by guidance and counselling services in Nigeria amidst insecurity is the issue of inadequate funding. As insecurity escalates, educational institutions are forced to divert financial resources to address immediate security concerns, such as employing private security guards, installing surveillance equipment, and building fortifications around school premises (Ojo & Eze, 2020). This reallocation of funds often comes at the expense of counselling services, which struggle to receive adequate financial support for training, materials, and the recruitment of professional counsellors. Inadequate funding limits the capacity of schools to provide necessary counselling resources, including career guidance tools, mental health materials, and access to external experts. In the face of these financial constraints, many schools are unable to expand or even maintain the counselling programs they already have, thereby further undermining their effectiveness (Adebayo, 2019).

Access, Equity, and Quality of Counselling Education in Nigeria amidst Insecurity

The provision of quality education in Nigeria, especially in the field of counselling, faces numerous challenges, with insecurity being one of the most significant obstacles. Insecurity in various regions of Nigeria, including insurgency, communal clashes, and other forms of violence, has a profound impact on educational access, equity, and the overall quality of education, including the specialized area of counselling education.

1. Access to Guidance and Counselling Education

Access to counselling education is a critical issue in Nigeria, particularly in areas severely impacted by insecurity. The instability caused by violence, kidnappings, and armed conflicts has led to the closure of schools and universities in affected regions, which in turn limits access to training for future counsellors (Eze, 2021). Furthermore, insecurity discourages students from enrolling in counselling programs or completing their education, as they may feel unsafe traveling to academic institutions or attending classes during times of conflict (Fagbemi, 2020). These barriers hinder the growth of counselling education programs, resulting in fewer opportunities for prospective students, especially those in rural or conflict-prone areas, to gain the necessary qualifications to enter the profession.

2. Equity in Guidance and Counselling Education

Equity in education refers to the fair distribution of educational resources and opportunities, ensuring that all students, regardless of their socioeconomic background, ethnicity, or geographical location, have equal access to quality education. In Nigeria, the issue of equity in counselling education is exacerbated by insecurity. Regions affected by insurgency, such as the northeastern part of the country, experience significant disruption to educational programs, including counselling training programs (Akinmoladun & Olowookere, 2020). These disruptions create a disparity in access to counselling education between regions, with students in conflict zones having limited opportunities to receive proper training. Consequently, this imbalance limits the development of qualified counsellors in underserved areas, thereby widening the gap in mental health support available to those who need it the most (Okechukwu, 2019).

3. The Quality of Guidance and Counselling Education

The quality of guidance and counselling education in Nigeria is critically challenged by the pervasive insecurity affecting the nation. Insecurity has significantly impacted students' mental health, academic performance, and overall well-being, necessitating robust counselling services within schools (Ekufu & Anetoh, 2024). School counsellors play a vital role in providing emotional support and coping strategies to help students navigate their fears and anxieties related to insecurity (Yakubu & Baha, 2021). Moreover, the integration of guidance and counselling into the educational framework is essential for fostering a supportive school environment that promotes resilience among students (Ekufu & Anetoh, 2024). The Nigerian government must prioritize investment in these services to enhance their quality and accessibility, particularly in regions most affected by violence and instability (Yakubu & Baha, 2021).

Conclusion

In conclusion, insecurity in Nigeria has significantly impacted on the accessibility, equity, and quality of guidance and counselling education, particularly in conflict-affected areas. Challenges include disruptions in curriculum delivery, safety concerns, and funding limitations. However, promising solutions such as the use of online platforms, community involvement, and technology for supervision can help address these issues. These measures can enhance access to counselling services, especially in rural and insecure regions, ensuring students receive the support they need. Tackling security concerns alongside

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implementing innovative approaches is essential for maintaining a resilient and high-quality counselling education system in Nigeria.

Recommendations

- 1. Leverage Technology for Guidance and Counselling Services:** To address the challenges of insecurity and limited access to counselling services, the Nigerian government and educational institutions should invest in scalable online counselling platforms. The Ministry of Education could partner with tech companies to develop a national online counselling portal, such as *EduCounsellingNG*, which provides real-time support to students in conflict zones. This platform should include features such as video counselling, chatbots for immediate assistance, and downloadable resources for self-help. Additionally, the government should provide free internet access to students in underserved areas through partnerships with telecommunications companies (Federal Ministry of Education, 2023).
- 2. Enhance Community-Based Guidance and Counselling Initiatives:** Schools should collaborate with local communities to establish community counselling centres in high-risk areas. These centres should be staffed by trained counsellors and community volunteers who understand the local context. In states like Borno and Zamfara, where insecurity is prevalent, community leaders and religious organizations could work with schools to create safe spaces for counselling sessions. The government should also provide training and stipends for community volunteers to ensure the sustainability of these programs (National Commission for Colleges of Education [NCCE], 2023).
- 3. Allocate Adequate Funding for Counselling Programs:** The government should allocate at least 5% of the annual education budget to mental health and counselling services, with a specific focus on conflict-prone regions. In the 2024 budget, ₦10 billion could be earmarked for training counsellors, purchasing counselling resources, and deploying technology for remote counselling in states like Adamawa, Kaduna, and Sokoto. Additionally, international organizations such as UNICEF and the World Bank should be encouraged to provide grants specifically for mental health initiatives in Nigerian schools (Ministry of Education, 2023).
- 4. Invest in Remote Supervision and Monitoring:** To ensure the quality of counselling services in insecure environments, the government should implement a remote supervision system using technology. A mobile app like *CounsellorMonitorNG* could be developed to allow supervisors to observe counselling sessions, provide feedback, and track counsellors' performance in real-time. This app could also include a database for recording student progress and identifying areas where additional support is needed. Furthermore, the government should mandate annual professional development workshops for counsellors, which can be conducted online to accommodate those in conflict zones (Nigerian Counselling Association [NCA], 2023).

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