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Counselling Unit And Other Resources Needed For Realization Of Basic Education In Nigeria: Challenges And Way Forward

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ABSTRACT
This paper explores counselling units' challenges and the need for additional resources to realize basic education in Nigeria. Implementing basic education is crucial for the holistic development of students, and counselling plays a vital role in addressing their academic, personal, and social needs. However, several challenges hinder the effectiveness of counselling units, including limited resources, high student-to-counsellor ratios, stigma, and inadequate training. Additionally, the lack of awareness and understanding of the importance of counselling further compounds these challenges. To overcome these barriers, this abstract suggests a way forward that includes increased investment in counselling services, staffing, and training of qualified counsellors, awareness campaigns, collaboration and integration with other stakeholders, cultural sensitivity, the establishment of referral networks, research and data collection, and parent and community engagement. By implementing these strategies, Nigeria can enhance the effectiveness of counselling units and ensure that students receive the necessary support for their academic success and overall well-being.
Keywords: counselling unit, resources, basic education, challenges, way forward, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

The realization of basic education in Nigeria is a fundamental goal for the holistic development of its citizens. In this pursuit, counselling units play a crucial role in providing support and guidance to students, addressing their academic, personal, and social needs. However, the effective implementation of counselling services faces numerous challenges, including limited resources and various systemic barriers. This paper examines the challenges faced by counselling units and the need for additional resources in the realization of basic education in Nigeria. It explores the implications of these challenges for the quality of counselling services and presents a way forward to overcome these obstacles. By addressing these challenges and ensuring the availability of necessary resources, Nigeria can enhance the effectiveness of counselling units and provide students with the support they need to succeed academically and thrive in their personal and social lives, (FRN, 2014, 2004).

Importance of Basic Education

The Universal Basic Education Programme was implemented in 1999 by the Federal Government of Nigeria as a reform initiative with the objective of enhancing accessibility to and assuring the quality of basic education throughout the country. The 2014 edition of the national policy on education stipulates that the government handles formal basic education, which is compulsory and free to all, (Austine et al., 2015; FRN, 2014, 2004). The 2014 national policy on education stipulated that basic education covers early childcare and development education (creches, daycare), pre-primary education, and primary and junior secondary education. Basic education provides formal education

training to children aged between 0-15 years. The age group distribution for sub-level of basic education is early childcare and development education – 0- 4 years, pre-primary education (1-year duration) – 5-year-olds, Primary education – 6-12 years, and Junior secondary education – 12- 15 years, (Austine et al., 2015; FRN, 2014, 2004). The objectives of the UBE initiative were stated at the outset, with some measurable targets and some less well-defined objectives, (Austine et al., 2015; FRN, 2014, 2004):

i. Develop in the entire citizenry a strong consciousness for education and a strong commitment to its vigorous promotion.
ii. Provide free, universal basic education for every Nigerian child of school-going age.
iii. Reduce drastically the incidence of drop-out from the formal school system (through improved relevance, quality, and efficiency)
iv. Cater for the learning needs of young people who, for one reason or another, have had to interrupt their schooling, through appropriate forms of complementary approaches to the provision and promotion of basic education.
v. Ensure the acquisition of appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy, manipulative, communicative and life skills, as well as the ethical, moral, and civic values needed for laying a solid foundation for lifelong learning, (Austine et al., 2015; FRN, 2014, 2004).

The main beneficiaries of the programme are children aged 3-5 years, for Early Children Care and Development Education (ECCDE), children aged 6-11+ years for primary school education, and children aged 12-14+ years for junior secondary school education. Its scope included the following expansion of activities in basic education: Programmes and initiatives for [ECCDE], Programmes and initiatives for the acquisition of functional literacy, numeracy and life skills, especially for adults (persons aged 15 and above), Out-of-school, non-formal programmes for the updating of knowledge and skills for persons who left school before acquiring the basics needed for lifelong learning, Special programmes of encouragement to all marginalised groups: girls and women, nomadic populations, out-of-school youth and the almajiris (Qur'anic student), amd Non-formal skills and apprenticeship training for adolescents and youth, who have not had the benefit of formal education, (Austine et al., 2015; FRN, 2014, 2004).

Basic education plays a crucial role in Nigeria, as it lays the foundation for a child's intellectual, social, and emotional development. Here are some key reasons why basic education is important in Nigeria, (Austine et al., 2015; FRN, 2014, 2004):

i. Empowerment: Basic education empowers individuals by providing them with essential knowledge and skills needed to navigate through life. It equips them with literacy, numeracy, and critical thinking skills, enabling them to make informed decisions and participate actively in society.
ii. Poverty Reduction: Education is a powerful tool for poverty reduction. Basic education equips individuals with the skills necessary to secure better job opportunities and improve their economic prospects. It helps break the cycle of poverty by providing individuals with the means to support themselves and their families.
iii. Health and Well-being: Basic education promotes health and well-being by imparting knowledge about hygiene, nutrition, and disease prevention. It helps individuals make informed choices regarding their health, leading to healthier lifestyles and reduced vulnerability to diseases.
iv. Social Cohesion: Basic education fosters social cohesion by promoting tolerance, understanding, and respect for diversity. It exposes children to different cultures, perspectives, and experiences, encouraging empathy and fostering a sense of unity among individuals from diverse backgrounds.
v. Gender Equality: Basic education is crucial for achieving gender equality. It helps address gender disparities by ensuring equal access to education for both boys and girls. Education empowers girls, reduces gender-based discrimination, and opens opportunities for their personal and professional growth.
vi. National Development: Basic education is a catalyst for national development. It equips individuals with the skills and knowledge needed to contribute effectively to the economic, social, and political development of the country. Educated individuals are more likely to be innovators, entrepreneurs, and active participants in nation-building.

vii. Peace and Stability: Basic education promotes peace and stability by fostering understanding, tolerance, and respect among individuals. It helps reduce social inequalities, address grievances, and build a more inclusive and harmonious society.

Investing in basic education in Nigeria is crucial for the overall development of individuals, communities, and the nation. It is a fundamental right that should be accessible to all, regardless of their socio-economic background or geographical location, (Austine et al., 2015; FRN, 2014, 2004; UN, 2020).

Roles Counselling in Achieving Academic Success

Counselling plays a vital role in education by providing support and guidance to students, helping them navigate academic, personal, and social challenges. Here are some key reasons why counselling is important in education:

i. Emotional Well-being: Counselling helps promote the emotional well-being of students. It provides a safe and confidential space for students to express their thoughts, feelings, and concerns. Counsellors can help students develop coping strategies, manage stress, and build resilience, enhancing their overall mental health.
ii. Academic Success: Counselling supports academic success by addressing barriers to learning. Counsellors can help students identify and overcome academic challenges, develop effective study skills, set goals, and manage time effectively. They can also provide guidance on career planning and post-secondary education options.
iii. Personal Development: Counselling facilitates personal growth and development. It helps students explore their interests, strengths, and values, enabling them to make informed decisions about their future. Counsellors can assist in developing self-awareness, self-confidence, and interpersonal skills, which are essential for personal and social success.
iv. Social and Emotional Skills: Counselling helps students develop essential social and emotional skills. It promotes empathy, communication, conflict resolution, and problem-solving skills, fostering positive relationships and healthy interactions with peers, teachers, and family members.
v. Behavioral Management: Counselling supports students in managing challenging behaviors. Counsellors can help identify the underlying causes of behavioral issues, provide strategies for self-regulation, and promote positive behavior patterns. This contributes to a positive and inclusive school environment.
vi. Crisis Intervention: Counselling plays a critical role in crisis intervention. Counsellors are trained to provide immediate support and assistance to students facing emergencies, trauma, or other critical situations. They can offer guidance, and referrals to appropriate resources, and help students navigate through difficult times.
vii. Parent and Teacher Collaboration: Counselling facilitates collaboration between parents, teachers, and students. Counsellors can work closely with parents and teachers to address concerns, develop intervention plans, and provide ongoing support. This partnership enhances student well-being and academic success.

Overall, counselling in education is essential for supporting students' holistic development, promoting their well-being, and ensuring their academic and personal success. It creates a supportive and nurturing environment where students can academically and emotionally thrive.

Challenges Faced by Counsellors, and Counselling in Implementing Basic Education in Nigeria

Counsellors and the counselling units in Nigeria face several challenges in implementing basic education. Some of these challenges include:

i. Limited Resources: Counselling units often lack adequate resources, including funding, staffing, and materials. This hinders their ability to provide comprehensive counselling services to students, (Bashari, 2022; David, et al., 2021; Daudi et al., 2023; Egbo, 2015; Florence; Mamman, 2022; Omoyemiju, 2022; Sarkasku and Umar, 2022; Urju, 2020).
ii. High Student-to-Counsellor Ratio: The student-to-counsellor ratio in many schools is often high, making it challenging for counsellors to provide individualized attention and support to students. This can affect the effectiveness and quality of counselling services,

(Bashari, 2022; David, et al., 2021; Daudi et al., 2023; Egbo, 2015; Florence; Mamman, 2022; Omoyemiju, 2022; Sarkasku and Umar, 2022; Urju, 2020)..

iii. Lack of Awareness and Understanding: There is a lack of awareness and understanding of the role and importance of counselling in education. This can result in limited support and recognition for counselling units, making it difficult for them to effectively carry out their responsibilities, (Bashari, 2022; David, et al., 2021; Daudi et al., 2023; Egbo, 2015; Florence; Mamman, 2022; Omoyemiju, 2022; Sarkasku and Umar, 2022; Urju, 2020)..

iv. Stigma and Misconceptions: Counselling still faces stigma and misconceptions in some communities, which can discourage students from seeking help. Addressing these stigmas and promoting the value of counselling is crucial for its effective implementation, (Bashari, 2022; David, et al., 2021; Daudi et al., 2023; Egbo, 2015; Florence; Mamman, 2022; Omoyemiju, 2022; Sarkasku and Umar, 2022; Urju, 2020)..

v. Inadequate Training and Professional Development: Some counsellors may lack the necessary training and professional development opportunities to enhance their skills and keep up with best practices in counselling. Continuous training and professional development are essential for counsellors to provide high-quality services, (Bashari, 2022; David, et al., 2021; Daudi et al., 2023; Egbo, 2015; Florence; Mamman, 2022; Omoyemiju, 2022; Sarkasku and Umar, 2022; Urju, 2020)..

vi. Limited Collaboration and Integration: Counselling units may face challenges in collaborating and integrating with other stakeholders in the education system, such as teachers, administrators, and parents. This can hinder the holistic support and coordination needed for effective counselling, (Bashari, 2022; David, et al., 2021; Daudi et al., 2023; Egbo, 2015; Florence; Mamman, 2022; Omoyemiju, 2022; Sarkasku and Umar, 2022; Urju, 2020)..

vii. Cultural and Language Barriers: Nigeria's cultural diversity and multiple languages can pose challenges for counsellors in providing culturally sensitive and inclusive counselling services. Counsellors need to be equipped with cultural competence and language skills to effectively engage with students from diverse backgrounds, (Bashari, 2022; David, et al., 2021; Daudi et al., 2023; Egbo, 2015; Florence; Mamman, 2022; Omoyemiju, 2022; Sarkasku and Umar, 2022; Urju, 2020)..

viii. Limited Referral Systems: Counselling units may face challenges in establishing effective referral systems to connect students with specialized services when needed. This can limit the ability to address complex issues and provide comprehensive support, (Bashari, 2022; David, et al., 2021; Daudi et al., 2023; Egbo, 2015; Florence; Mamman, 2022; Omoyemiju, 2022; Sarkasku and Umar, 2022; Urju, 2020)..

Addressing these challenges requires concerted efforts from education authorities, policymakers, and stakeholders. Providing adequate resources, reducing student-to-counsellor ratios, promoting awareness, and understanding of counselling, offering training and professional development opportunities, and fostering collaboration are crucial steps towards improving the implementation of counselling in basic education in Nigeria, (Bashari, 2022; David, et al., 2021; Daudi et al., 2023; Egbo, 2015; Florence; Mamman, 2022; Omoyemiju, 2022; Sarkasku and Umar, 2022; Urju, 2020)..

Way Forward

To address the challenges faced by counsellors and the counselling units in the implementation of basic education in Nigeria, several strategies can be implemented. Here are some ways forward, (Bashari, 2022; David, et al., 2021; Daudi et al., 2023; Egbo, 2015; Florence; Mamman, 2022; Omoyemiju, 2022; Sarkasku and Umar, 2022; Urju, 2020).:

i. Increased Investment: The government should prioritize and allocate adequate funding for counselling services in schools. This includes budgetary provisions for staffing, training, resources, and infrastructure for counselling units, (Bashari, 2022; David, et al., 2021; Daudi et al., 2023; Egbo, 2015; Florence; Mamman, 2022; Omoyemiju, 2022; Sarkasku and Umar, 2022; Urju, 2020)..

ii. Staffing and Training: Increase the number of qualified counsellors in schools to ensure a manageable student-to-counsellor ratio. Provide ongoing professional development and

training opportunities for counsellors to enhance their skills, knowledge, and competencies, (Bahari 2022; Daudi et al., 2023).

iii. Awareness and Advocacy: Conduct awareness campaigns to educate stakeholders, including students, parents, teachers, and administrators, about the importance and benefits of counselling services. Advocate for the recognition and integration of counselling as an essential component of basic education, (Bashari, 2022; David, et al., 2021; Daudi et al., 2023; Egbo, 2015; Florence; Mamman, 2022; Omoyemiju, 2022; Sarkasku and Umar, 2022; Urju, 2020)..

iv. Collaboration and Integration: Foster collaboration and integration between counselling units, teachers, administrators, and parents. Encourage regular communication, coordination, and joint efforts to support students' holistic development and well-being, (Bashari, 2022; David, et al., 2021; Daudi et al., 2023; Egbo, 2015; Florence; Mamman, 2022; Omoyemiju, 2022; Sarkasku and Umar, 2022; Urju, 2020)..

v. Cultural Sensitivity and Inclusivity: Promote cultural sensitivity and inclusivity in counselling practices. Train counsellors to understand and respect diverse cultural backgrounds, traditions, and languages. Provide interpreters or bilingual counsellors to overcome language barriers, (Bashari, 2022; David, et al., 2021; Daudi et al., 2023; Egbo, 2015; Florence; Mamman, 2022; Omoyemiju, 2022; Sarkasku and Umar, 2022; Urju, 2020)

vi. Referral Networks: Establish effective referral networks and partnerships with external agencies, organizations, and professionals to provide specialized support and services when needed. Develop clear protocols and procedures for referrals and follow-up, (Bashari, 2022; David, et al., 2021; Daudi et al., 2023; Egbo, 2015; Florence; Mamman, 2022; Omoyemiju, 2022; Sarkasku and Umar, 2022; Urju, 2020).

vii. Research and Data Collection: Conduct research and collect data on the effectiveness and impact of counselling services in basic education. Use this evidence to advocate for further support, resources, and policy changes, (Bashari, 2022; David, et al., 2021; Daudi et al., 2023; Egbo, 2015; Florence; Mamman, 2022; Omoyemiju, 2022; Sarkasku and Umar, 2022; Urju, 2020).

viii. Monitoring and Evaluation: Implement robust monitoring and evaluation systems to assess the quality and outcomes of counselling services. Use this information to identify areas for improvement, make evidence-based decisions, and ensure accountability, (Bashari, 2022; David, et al., 2021; Daudi et al., 2023; Egbo, 2015; Florence; Mamman, 2022; Omoyemiju, 2022; Sarkasku and Umar, 2022; Urju, 2020).

ix. Parent and Community Engagement: Involve parents and the community in the counselling process. Conduct workshops, seminars, and parent-teacher meetings to educate parents about the role of counselling and encourage their active participation and support, (Bashari, 2022; David, et al., 2021; Daudi et al., 2023; Egbo, 2015; Florence; Mamman, 2022; Omoyemiju, 2022; Sarkasku and Umar, 2022; Urju, 2020).

By implementing these strategies, Nigeria can strengthen the counselling units in schools and ensure that students receive the necessary support for their academic, personal, and social development.

Other Resources Needed for Effective Implementation of Basic Education in Nigeria

To ensure the effective implementation of basic education in Nigeria, several key resources are needed. These resources include:

i. Qualified Teachers: Having enough qualified and trained teachers is crucial for effective basic education. Teachers should have the necessary knowledge, skills, and pedagogical techniques to deliver quality education and engage students effectively, (Adebunmi, 2017; Alex, 2019; Ikechi, 2018; Oladele, 2018).

ii. Adequate Infrastructure: Access to appropriate infrastructure is essential for basic education. This includes well-equipped classrooms, libraries, science laboratories, computer labs, and other facilities that support effective teaching and learning, (Adebunmi, 2017; Alex, 2019; Ikechi, 2018; Oladele, 2018).

iii. Learning Materials and Resources: Sufficient and up-to-date learning materials and resources are necessary for effective basic education. This includes textbooks, workbooks,

reference materials, teaching aids, and access to digital resources that enhance learning experiences, (Adebunmi, 2017; Alex, 2019; Ikechi, 2018; Oladele, 2018).

iv. Curriculum and Educational Policies: A well-designed and relevant curriculum that aligns with national educational goals and standards is essential. Clear educational policies and guidelines provide a framework for effective teaching and learning, ensuring consistency and quality across schools, (Adebunmi, 2017; Alex, 2019; Ikechi, 2018; Oladele, 2018).

v. Technology Integration: Integrating technology into basic education can enhance learning experiences and improve access to information. Access to computers, internet connectivity, and educational software can support interactive and engaging learning environments, (Adebunmi, 2017; Alex, 2019; Ikechi, 2018; Oladele, 2018).

vi. Funding and Investment: Adequate funding and investment in basic education are crucial for its effective implementation. This includes government budget allocations, international aid, and private sector contributions to support infrastructure development, teacher training, and resource provision, (Adebunmi, 2017; Alex, 2019; Ikechi, 2018; Oladele, 2018).

vii. Community Engagement: Engaging parents, community members, and local stakeholders is important for the effective implementation of basic education. Collaboration and partnerships with the community can provide additional resources, support, and involvement in educational initiatives, (Adebunmi, 2017; Alex, 2019; Ikechi, 2018; Oladele, 2018).

viii. Monitoring and Evaluation: Establishing robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms helps track progress, identify challenges, and make evidence-based decisions. Regular assessments, data collection, and feedback mechanisms ensure accountability and continuous improvement, (Adebunmi, 2017; Alex, 2019; Ikechi, 2018; Oladele, 2018).

ix. Inclusive Practices: Promoting inclusive practices in basic education ensures that all children, including those with disabilities, have equal access to education. This requires providing necessary support services, specialized training for teachers, and accessible learning environments, (Adebunmi, 2017; Alex, 2019; Ikechi, 2018; Oladele, 2018).

By addressing these resource needs, Nigeria can enhance the quality and effectiveness of basic education, leading to improved learning outcomes and opportunities for all children. To address these challenges and pave the way forward, it is crucial to increase investment in counselling services, ensuring adequate funding for staffing, training, and resources, (Adebunmi, 2017; Alex, 2019; Ikechi, 2018; Oladele, 2018). Reducing student-to-counsellor ratios, promoting awareness and advocacy, fostering collaboration and integration, and promoting cultural sensitivity and inclusivity are essential steps. Establishing effective referral networks, conducting research and data collection, and engaging parents and the community are also vital for the success of counselling units in basic education. By implementing these strategies, Nigeria can overcome the challenges faced by counselling units and ensure that students receive comprehensive support for their academic, personal, and social development. The provision of quality counselling services will contribute to the realization of basic education goals and empower students to reach their full potential, fostering a brighter future for Nigeria as a whole, (Adebunmi, 2017; Alex, 2019; Ikechi, 2018; Oladele, 2018).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the implementation of basic education in Nigeria requires the establishment of effective counselling units and the provision of necessary resources. However, numerous challenges hinder the realization of this goal. Insufficient funding, limited infrastructure, high student-to-counsellor ratios, stigma, and inadequate training are among the key challenges faced by counselling units. Additionally, the lack of awareness and understanding of the importance of counselling further exacerbates these issues.

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