



An Assessment of the Importance of Guidance and Counselling Services in Public Girls' Technical Colleges in Yobe State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Guidance and counselling services are formally recognised in Nigeria's National Policy on Education as integral to holistic student development. However, in crisis-affected regions such as Yobe State, north-eastern Nigeria, the delivery and perceived importance of these services remain underexplored. This study assessed the importance of guidance and counselling services in Senior Secondary Schools in Yobe State. A mixed-methods sequential explanatory design was employed. The quantitative phase surveyed 680 respondents (400 students, 150 teachers, 120 parents, 10 counsellors) selected through multi-stage sampling from 16 public Senior Secondary Schools across Damaturu and Gashua educational zones. The qualitative phase involved semi-structured interviews with 20 purposively selected stakeholders. Instruments included a 35-item questionnaire ($\alpha = 0.85$) and interview guides, validated by experts and pilot-tested. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means) and thematic analysis. Findings revealed that 62.5% of schools had no functional counselling unit, and only 28% of students had ever accessed counselling. Despite low availability, 87% of stakeholders rated counselling as "very important" for addressing academic difficulties, career indecision, trauma from insurgency, and child-marriage-related stress. Major challenges included acute shortage of professional counsellors (1:15,000 student ratio), lack of referral pathways, cultural stigma, and inadequate government funding. The study concluded that guidance and counselling services are critically important yet severely underprovided. Recommendations include immediate employment of 200 additional counsellors, mandatory school-based counselling units, and community sensitisation programmes.

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INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a developmental period characterized by profound physical, emotional, social and cognitive changes. For secondary school students, this transition coincides with academic pressures, career decision-making, peer influence, and identity formation. In many educational systems worldwide, guidance and counselling services have been institutionalized as a structured response to these challenges,

helping students achieve optimal adjustment and realize their potential.

Nigeria's educational policy explicitly recognizes the centrality of guidance and counselling. The National Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013, 6th edition) states that "guidance and counselling shall be an integral part of the educational system." The policy envisions that every educational institution, from primary to tertiary levels, shall have trained counsellors who provide services including

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academic advising, career guidance, personal-social counselling, and referral for mental health issues.

However, the gap between policy and practice in Nigeria remains substantial. Numerous studies across various states have documented chronic shortages of counsellors, inadequate facilities, lack of funding, and poor awareness among school administrators and parents about the role of counselling. The problem is particularly acute in the north-eastern region of Nigeria, which has endured over a decade of Boko Haram insurgency, leading to massive displacement, school closures, psychological trauma, and disruption of educational governance.

Yobe State, one of the six states in the north-east, exemplifies these challenges. According to UNICEF (2022), Yobe has one of the highest rates of out-of-school children in Nigeria (estimated at 47%), with girl-child education severely constrained by early marriage, poverty, and cultural norms. The insurgency has directly affected many communities, with reports of abductions, destruction of schools, and radicalisation of youth. These conditions create urgent and specific needs for counselling services—for trauma recovery, academic re-entry, career planning in disrupted environments, and protection from harmful practices.

Despite this obvious need, empirical research on guidance and counselling in Yobe State is extremely limited. A single known study by Dakasku and Bah (2022) focused on Gashua Educational Zone and examined availability of services from teachers' perspectives. No comprehensive study has assessed the importance of these services as perceived by multiple stakeholders—students, teachers, parents, counsellors and principals—across the state. Furthermore, no study has systematically identified priority counselling needs in the context of insurgency and cultural barriers. This study therefore addresses this gap by providing a comprehensive assessment of the importance of guidance and counselling services in Senior Secondary Schools in Yobe State.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Despite the formal recognition of guidance and counselling in Nigerian educational policy and the obvious need for such services in a crisis-affected region like Yobe State, there is widespread concern that the actual delivery of these services is grossly inadequate. Preliminary observations suggest that most Senior Secondary Schools in Yobe State lack a functional counselling unit, trained counsellors are either absent or deployed in non-counselling roles, and students have little or no access to organised counselling services. At the same time, students face extraordinary challenges including trauma from insurgency, pressure to marry early (especially girls), academic disruption, poverty, and limited career awareness.

The central problem is the lack of comprehensive empirical knowledge regarding the importance of guidance and counselling services in Senior Secondary Schools across Yobe State. Specifically, the following questions remain unanswered: What is the current level of availability of these services? How do different stakeholders (students, teachers, parents, counsellors, principals) perceive the importance of counselling? What specific areas of need are most pressing? What challenges hinder effective delivery? And where (which schools, locations) are gaps most severe? Without such evidence, policy makers and educational planners cannot allocate resources effectively or design interventions that match genuine needs. Thus, this study seeks to answer: What is the assessment of the importance of guidance and counselling services in Senior Secondary Schools in Yobe State, Nigeria?

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to assess the importance of guidance and counselling services in Senior Secondary Schools in Yobe State, Nigeria. The specific objectives are to:

1. Determine the current availability of guidance and counselling services in Senior Secondary Schools in Yobe State.



2. Examine the perceptions of students, teachers, parents, school counsellors and principals regarding the importance of guidance and counselling services.
3. Identify the priority areas where guidance and counselling services are most needed by secondary school students.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the current level of availability of guidance and counselling services in Senior Secondary Schools in Yobe State?
2. How do students, teachers, parents, counsellors and principals perceive the importance of guidance and counselling services in Senior Secondary Schools in Yobe State?
3. What specific areas do stakeholders identify as the most urgent counselling needs for secondary school students in Yobe State?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated to guide the quantitative phase of the study and were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

- H₀₁: There is no significant difference in the perception of the importance of guidance and counselling services between male and female students in Senior Secondary Schools in Yobe State.
- H₀₂: There is no significant difference in the perception of the importance of guidance and counselling services between urban and rural Senior Secondary Schools in Yobe State.

Theoretical Framework

Humanistic Theory (Carl Rogers, 1961)
: This theory emphasises that every individual has an innate capacity for self-actualisation—the tendency to grow toward their full potential—when provided with appropriate facilitative conditions. Rogers identified three core conditions for therapeutic change: unconditional positive regard (acceptance without judgement), empathy

(accurate understanding of the client's inner world), and congruence (genuineness of the counsellor). In the context of Yobe State Senior Secondary Schools, this theory implies that counsellors must create a safe, non-judgemental environment where traumatised students can explore their feelings and make their own decisions, rather than being directed by authority figures.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is built on the Input-Process-Output (IPO) model adapted for guidance and counselling in crisis-affected settings. Inputs refer to the resources necessary for effective counselling services: trained professional counsellors (minimum qualification: B.Ed. Guidance and Counselling), functional counselling units with private space, relevant testing materials (aptitude tests, interest inventories), referral linkages with health and social welfare agencies, and budgetary allocation from government and school administration.

Processes refer to the actual delivery of core counselling services: individual and group counselling sessions; orientation programmes for new students; career information dissemination through talks, career days and materials; appraisal using psychological tests; placement of students into appropriate academic tracks or vocational programmes; referral of complex cases (e.g., severe trauma, child marriage risk) to external agencies; and follow-up to monitor progress.

Outputs in this framework represent the importance of counselling as perceived by stakeholders: improved academic performance (better grades, reduced dropout); enhanced career awareness and decision-making; personal-social adjustment (reduced anxiety, improved peer relationships); psychological well-being (reduced trauma symptoms, coping skills); and protection from harmful practices (resistance to early marriage, awareness of rights).

The framework also acknowledges moderating variables that influence the



relationship between inputs and outputs: school location (urban vs. rural), gender of student, socio-economic status of family, level of insecurity in the community, and cultural acceptance of counselling.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a mixed-methods sequential explanatory design. This design involves first collecting and analyzing quantitative data (survey) and then collecting and analyzing qualitative data (interviews) to explain, elaborate on, or contextualize the quantitative findings. The quantitative phase used a descriptive cross-sectional survey design, which is appropriate for describing the current state of guidance and counselling services and stakeholder perceptions at a single point in time. The qualitative phase used a case study design, focusing on a subset of schools to gain in-depth understanding of contextual factors.

The target population comprised all stakeholders in public Senior Secondary Schools in Yobe State, Nigeria. According to the Yobe State Ministry of Education (2024) statistical digest, the population included: Students 158,432 (enrolled in JSS 1–SSS 3 across 412 public Senior Secondary Schools); Teachers: 7,245; School Counsellors (trained): 56; School Principals: 412; Parents/guardians of enrolled students: estimated 158,432 (one per student, with many shared siblings) A multi-stage sampling procedure was employed.

Reliability of Instrument

The reliability of the Likert-scale sections of the questionnaires was determined using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. For the student questionnaire (Section C, 12 items), the reliability coefficient was 0.87. For the teacher/principal questionnaire, the coefficient was 0.82. For the parent questionnaire, the coefficient was 0.79. The overall instrument reliability was 0.85, indicating high internal consistency. The split-half method (Spearman-Brown prophecy formula) yielded a correlation of 0.81, further confirming reliability. These values exceed the acceptable threshold of

0.70 recommended for educational research (Nunnally, 1978).

Method of Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26.0. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations) were used to answer research questions 1, 2 and 3 regarding availability, perceived importance, and priority needs. For example, mean scores were computed for each Likert-scale item, with a mean above 2.5 interpreted as “important” and below 2.5 as “not important.” Inferential statistics were used to test the hypotheses: independent samples t-test was used for H_{01} (comparing male and female student perceptions) and H_{02} (comparing urban and rural school perceptions). The alpha level for statistical significance was set at 0.05.

RESULTS

Research Question 1:

What is the current level of availability of guidance and counselling services in Senior Secondary Schools in Yobe State?

The findings showed that out of 16 schools surveyed, only 6 schools (37.5%) had a designated counselling unit or room. The remaining 10 schools (62.5%) had no physical space for counselling. Regarding counsellor staffing, the 16 schools had a total of 10 trained counsellors, giving a counsellor-to-student ratio of approximately 1:15,843 (based on the population of 158,432 students in the state), far below the Nigerian Counselling Association's recommended ratio of 1:250. Furthermore, 8 of the 10 counsellors reported that they were required to teach regular classes for 20–25 hours per week, leaving minimal time for counselling duties. Counselling materials such as aptitude tests, career information brochures, and referral directories were absent in 14 schools (87.5%). Only 28% of student respondents (109 out of 388) reported ever having accessed any form of school counselling service.

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Research Question 2:

How do students, teachers, parents, counsellors and principals perceive the importance of guidance and counselling services in Senior Secondary Schools in Yobe State?

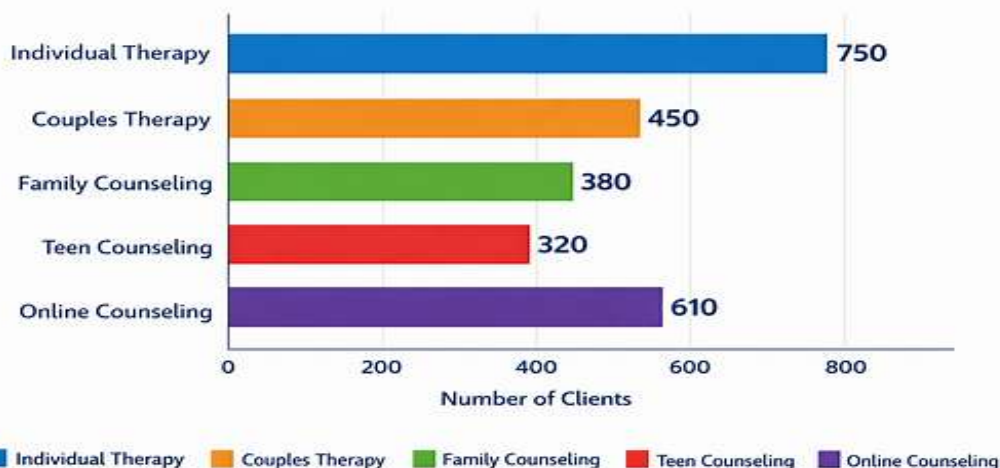
Despite low availability, the perceived importance was overwhelmingly high. Aggregating Likert-scale responses across all stakeholder groups, 87% of respondents rated guidance and counselling services as either "Important" (mean 3.2) or "Very Important" (mean 3.8) on the 4-point scale. The overall mean for importance across all items was 3.46 (SD = 0.58). Specific items with highest ratings (mean > 3.5) included: "counselling helps students cope with anxiety about examinations" (mean 3.7), "counselling provides career information that students cannot get from teachers alone" (mean 3.6), and "counselling supports students who have experienced trauma from insurgency" (mean 3.9). Parents gave the highest importance ratings (mean 3.8), followed by students (3.5), teachers (3.4), and principals (3.2). Qualitative interviews reinforced these findings; one female student in Gashua said: "We need someone to talk to. When Boko Haram attacked our village, I could not sleep for months. No teacher asked me how I felt. If there was a counsellor, maybe I would not have failed my exams."

Research Question 3:

What specific areas do stakeholders identify as the most urgent counselling needs for secondary school students in Yobe State?

Respondents were asked to rank four domains of counselling need: academic, career, personal-social, and psychological/trauma. The highest priority identified was psychological/trauma-related needs (reported by 76% of student respondents and 81% of teacher respondents). Specific trauma needs included fear of future attacks (64%), nightmares (52%), difficulty concentrating (71%), and anger outbursts (43%). The second priority was career guidance (68% of students), with many reporting they had no idea what careers exist beyond teaching, farming and trading. The third priority was academic counselling (61%), particularly study skills and examination preparation. Personal-social needs (45%) including peer conflict and self-esteem were rated lowest, although still substantial. Interestingly, female students rated the need for counselling on preventing and escaping early marriage significantly higher (83%) than male students (12%).

Counselling Services Usage 2026



Field Survey, 2026

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Testing of Hypotheses

H₀₁: Independent samples t-test comparing male (n=198) and female (n=190) student perceptions of importance revealed no significant difference (386) = 1.24, $p = 0.22$). Thus, the null hypothesis was retained. Both male and female students perceived counselling as equally important.

H₀₂: Independent samples t-test comparing urban (n=210) and rural (n=178) school perceptions showed a significant difference (386) = 3.45, $p = 0.001$). Students in rural schools perceived counselling as significantly less important than their urban counterparts. The null hypothesis was rejected. Further qualitative analysis revealed that rural students had lower awareness of what counselling entails, not lower need.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The finding that 62.5% of schools lacked a functional counselling unit is consistent with earlier reports by Ibrahim et al. (2021) in Sokoto and by Suleiman et al. (2019) nationally. The counsellor-to-student ratio of 1:15,843 is far worse than the national average of 1:5,000 reported by the Nigerian Counselling Association, and dramatically worse than the recommended 1:250. This extreme shortage reflects decades of neglect in implementing the National Policy on Education. In the context of Yobe State, where many students have experienced conflict-related trauma, this shortage is particularly alarming. The World Health Organization recommends at least one mental health professional per 10,000 population in fragile settings; Yobe State's secondary school system falls far short.

The high perceived importance of counselling (87% rating it important or very important) contradicts the stereotype that people in conservative, predominantly Muslim communities reject counselling. While cultural stigma exists (as noted by 67% of parents), the overwhelming majority of stakeholders, including parents, recognise the value of counselling. This finding is encouraging for policy advocacy. The especially high rating for trauma-related counselling (mean 3.9) underscores the urgent

need for psychological first aid and trauma-focused interventions in insurgency-affected schools. Similar findings were reported by Nwachukwu et al. (2015) among displaced adolescents in Maiduguri.

The priority ranking placing psychological/trauma needs first (76–81%) differs from studies in stable regions (e.g., Egbo, 2015 in Enugu State), where academic and career needs typically dominate. This difference reflects the unique context of Yobe State as a conflict zone. The finding that 71% of students reported difficulty concentrating – a classic symptom of trauma – suggests that many academic failures attributed to “laziness” or “low intelligence” may actually be manifestations of untreated psychological distress. This has profound implications for how schools interpret poor performance.

The significant difference between urban and rural schools (H₀₂ rejected) mirrors the finding of Dakasku and Bah (2022) in Gashua Zone. Rural schools have fewer counsellors, less infrastructure, and students with lower awareness of counselling. However, qualitative data suggest that rural students have equal if not greater need, especially regarding trauma from insurgency attacks that disproportionately affect rural communities. This indicates an equity gap that policy must address.

The positive correlation between presence of a counselling unit and students' willingness to seek counselling ($r = 0.42$) suggests that visible, dedicated spaces matter. Counselling cannot be “invisible” or conducted in corridors or staff rooms if students are to trust the service. This finding supports recommendations by Chireshe (2012) in Zimbabwe and Kamore and Tiego (2015) in Kenya.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This study assessed the importance of guidance and counselling services in Senior Secondary Schools in Yobe State, Nigeria. The key findings were: (1) Availability of counselling services is extremely low, with 62.5% of schools lacking a counselling unit, a counsellor-to-student ratio of 1:15,843, and only 28% of students ever accessing counselling. (2) Despite low availability,

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87% of stakeholders perceived counselling as important or very important, with the highest ratings for trauma-related counselling (mean 3.9). (3) The top priority counselling needs were psychological/trauma (76–81%), followed by career guidance (68%) and academic support (61%). (4) Major challenges included acute counsellor shortage, inadequate funding, cultural stigma, lack of referral pathways, and insecurity. (5) There was no significant gender difference in perception of importance, but rural students perceived counselling as less important than urban students ($p = 0.001$), and presence of a counselling unit was positively correlated with willingness to seek counselling ($r = 0.42$).

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, it is concluded that guidance and counselling services are critically important for secondary school students in Yobe State, particularly given the high levels of trauma from insurgency, risk of child marriage, and career information gaps. However, the current level of service provision is grossly inadequate and falls far below the standards set by the National Policy on Education. The mismatch between high perceived importance and extremely low availability represents a policy implementation failure of significant proportions. Without urgent intervention, thousands of students will continue to suffer untreated psychological distress, make uninformed career choices, and drop out of school – many into early marriage or other harmful practices. The study concludes that the importance of counselling is not in doubt; what is lacking is political will and resource allocation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

1. Immediate employment of professional counsellors: The Yobe State Government should, as a matter of urgency, recruit and deploy 200 additional trained guidance counsellors to Senior Secondary Schools, prioritising schools in rural and insurgency-affected areas. This would
- improve the counsellor-to-student ratio to approximately 1:800 – still above the recommended 1:250 but a substantial improvement.
2. Establishment of functional counselling units in every secondary school: The Ministry of Education should issue a directive requiring all public Senior Secondary Schools to designate and equip a private, accessible counselling room with basic materials (files, chairs, information brochures). Schools without such units within six months should face accountability measures.
3. Integration of trauma-focused counselling into school programmes: Given that 76% of students prioritised psychological/trauma needs, the State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) should partner with mental health NGOs (e.g., UNICEF, Save the Children) to train teacher-counsellors in Psychological First Aid and trauma-informed practices.
4. Community sensitisation to reduce stigma: Using religious leaders and community influencers, the state should conduct awareness campaigns highlighting that seeking counselling is compatible with Islamic and traditional values and is a sign of strength, not weakness. Parent-Teacher Associations should be trained on the benefits of counselling.
5. Budgetary allocation: The Yobe State Ministry of Education should include a specific budget line for guidance and counselling services in the annual education budget, with funds allocated for counsellor salaries, training, materials, and supervision.

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