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Implementation of Guidance and Counselling Services in Senior Secondary Schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the evaluation of the implementation of guidance and counseling services in senior secondary schools within the Port Harcourt Metropolis in Rivers State. Two research questions and two corresponding hypotheses were developed to guide the study. The design of the study was a descriptive research design. The population of the study comprised 65,000 senior secondary school students (SS1 to SS3) and 350 guidance counselors in Port Harcourt Metropolis. The sample size was 400 for the students, while the counselors were 40, giving a total sample size of 440. The researcher adopted a simple random sampling technique to select the respondents for the study. The instrument for data collection was a well-structured questionnaire titled: Evaluation of the Implementation of Guidance and Counseling Services in Senior Secondary Schools Questionnaire. The four-point rating scale was used and validated by experts in the Department of Educational Psychology, Guidance and Counseling. The data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions, while t-test statistics were used to test the hypotheses. The null hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance. The reliability of the instrument was established using Cronbach Alpha statistics with a value of 0.83. Based on the analysis, the findings of the study revealed that availability of tools and availability of finances affects the effective implementation of guidance and Counseling services in senior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis. The study recommended that: Rivers State Ministry of Education should provide specific and regular budgetary allocations to sustain guidance and counselling programmes in all public secondary schools and schools should be equipped with standard counselling rooms, psychological test kits, ICT-based career guidance software, and relevant instructional materials to enhance service quality.

Keywords: Evaluation, Implementation, Guidance and Counseling Services

INTRODUCTION

Education is universally recognized as a critical driver for individual and national development, empowering citizens with the knowledge, skills, and values needed for productive participation in society (Federal Republic of Nigeria, FRN, 2013). As a holistic educational framework, guidance and counseling services have emerged as indispensable for nurturing well-rounded youths, especially during the crucial years of senior secondary schooling. These services are defined as organized, purposeful activities that assist students in making informed decisions regarding their academic pursuits, career aspirations, relationships, and personal challenges (Nwachuku, 2021).

The recent complex changes and education trends in the world of work and society call for proper implementation of guidance and counseling services in Nigeria particularly in the school system. Some of these trends are unstable homes, poor academic performance, drug abuse, high risk of sexual exploitation, cultism; kidnapping, youth restiveness etc. of latest concern to the government and stakeholders of education is the trend where some graduates of primary and secondary schools are unable to pass common entrance examinations into secondary and tertiary levels.

The need for guidance and counselling in schools has become imperative in order to promote the well-being of learners. It is therefore important that school guidance and counselling services are fully functional and available to all learners in all schools to help alleviate the problems that they face. When schools are mainly concerned with delivering an academic curriculum, other aspects of the schools' role, such as providing personal and social education, tend to be overlooked (Hornby, Hall & Hall, 2003). In addition to intellectual challenges, students encounter personal/social, educational and career challenges that needs to be addressed. For guidance and Counseling to be effective, the initiators must have to work very hard to be able to convince the members of the society of the importance of the discipline. To do this involves funds, traveling, organizing seminars, workshops, conference, talks etc.

Furthermore, like any new innovation or programme, the introduction of guidance and Counseling has been warmly received by various groups in Nigeria many up till now still question the usefulness of Counseling in Nigeria setting. Besides, in most schools the time tables are often so congested and rigid that students who might even wish to consult the counsellor might find it extremely difficult to do so. The observation however, is that most of what ought to be in place for the effective implementation of guidance and Counseling services are not really there. Hence the need for a study like this.

Guidance and Counseling teachers need to be supported in carrying out innovative activities towards provision of their services. Various scholars, educators, politicians and even the general public have underscored the importance of adequate funding and infrastructure. All education managers should therefore support the teacher's efforts in the process of implementing the guidance and counseling program. Unfortunately most of the head teachers are appointed from amongst serving teachers most of whom lack training in institutional management (Kafwa, 2005). This adversely affects effective management of educational institutions and maintenance of quality and high standards of education including guidance and counseling services. Further, the fact is that the education sectors in most countries have no provisions for guidance and counseling programs. Whatever funding is available for the implementation programmes is ad hoc and grossly inadequate. According to UNESCO (2007), responses from two countries in Africa gave the indication that since the establishment of their education committees with decentralized organs in all regions and districts, the education authorities have not made any funding available to them outside whatever funds they sourced from international agencies.

Despite these advancements, the implementation of guidance and counseling in Nigerian schools is often fraught with challenges. In urban areas such as Port Harcourt Metropolis a commercial hub and one of the most densely populated cities in southern Nigeria the student population is highly diverse. Young people contend with the stresses of urban life, including exposure to crime, substance abuse, cultural diversity, socio-economic disparities, and heightened competition for limited opportunities (Eze & Okafor, 2021). These factors accentuate the need for effective psychosocial support mechanisms in the educational system. Guidance and counseling units in Port Harcourt's schools are expected to bridge the gap between the academic demands placed on students and their psychological well-being, yet implementation is hindered by several systemic constraints.

Many secondary schools, both public and private, struggle with a shortage of professional counselors—a situation made worse by insufficient government funding, lack of specialized facilities, and limited training opportunities for staff (Adora, 2020). Often, teachers with little or no background in counseling are saddled with the additional burden of providing services they are under qualified for, leading to subpar outcomes (Abubakar, 2021). Furthermore, there is an absence of standardized protocols for delivering guidance and counseling, making it difficult to monitor and assess the effectiveness of such programs across different schools.

Given this context, there is a pressing need to investigate how guidance and counseling services are currently being executed in Port Harcourt's senior secondary schools. Such an evaluation will provide evidence-based insights into the strengths and weaknesses of current practices, and inform the development of effective strategies for improving student support in line with global best practices and national educational objectives.

Concept of Guidance and Counseling

Guidance has been defined by Makinde (1984) as "a purposeful, organized program of services provided to assist individuals in making and carrying out adequate plans for their lives." UNESCO (2002)

defines it more broadly as “a range of processes and interventions that assist individuals to understand themselves and the world of work, and to make appropriate educational, occupational, and personal decisions.”

Counseling, according to Gibson and Mitchell (2011), is “a professional relationship that empowers diverse individuals, families, and groups to accomplish mental health, wellness, education, and career goals.” The Nigerian Counselling Association (CASSON, 2018) emphasizes that counseling in schools should integrate academic, career, and psychosocial interventions tailored to the developmental stage of the learner.

Importance and Relevance of Guidance and Counseling in Schools

Guidance and counseling occupy a central role in the overall educational process, particularly in senior secondary schools, where students face a critical period of academic specialization, identity formation, and career decision-making. In the Nigerian context especially in rapidly growing urban centers like Port Harcourt the importance of guidance and counseling cannot be overstated. Senior secondary school students are expected to make choices that will have long-term implications for their personal, educational, and professional futures. Without structured guidance, these decisions may be based on misinformation, peer pressure, or temporary emotions rather than informed self-awareness and labor market realities.

1. Academic Support and Improvement

One of the most visible contributions of guidance and counseling is the improvement of academic performance. Counselors help students develop effective study habits, manage examination stress, and address learning difficulties.

2. Career Decision-Making and Vocational Preparation

Senior secondary school is the stage where students must decide on career paths whether to pursue university education, vocational training, or immediate employment.

3. Emotional and Social Development

Adolescence is a period of significant emotional change. Without proper support, students may struggle with low self-esteem, peer pressure, relationship conflicts, or family issues.

4. Mental Health Awareness and Intervention

The pressures of urban life, high academic competition, and family instability in Port Harcourt can lead to mental health issues among students.

5. Reduction of Dropout Rates

Dropouts in Nigerian secondary schools are often linked to academic frustration, financial difficulties, or lack of career direction. Guidance programs identify at-risk students early and provide interventions to keep them in school.

6. Positive School Climate and Discipline

Guidance and counseling contribute to a positive school climate by promoting mutual respect, empathy, and ethical conduct.

Counselors provide alternative dispute resolution methods, reducing reliance on punitive discipline. They help teachers and administrators understand students’ behavioral challenges in context, leading to fairer interventions.

7. Parental Engagement

Effective guidance programs also bridge the gap between school and home by involving parents in their children’s educational and personal development. Counselors organize parental workshops on adolescent

development. Parents are informed of their children's strengths and areas for improvement, enabling better home support.

Implementation Factors and Challenges

The implementation of guidance and counseling services in senior secondary schools is a multifaceted process influenced by policy frameworks, resource availability, personnel competence, school culture, and socio-cultural acceptance. While Nigeria's National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013) mandates that "every child shall have access to guidance and counseling services," the translation of this directive into effective practice varies widely across schools and states.

In Port Harcourt Metropolis, implementation outcomes differ significantly between public and private schools, reflecting disparities in funding, staffing, and infrastructure.

1. Policy Support and Enforcement

Role of National and State Policies

The National Policy on Education provides a legal mandate for guidance and counseling.

The Rivers State Ministry of Education supplements this with operational guidelines for secondary schools.

2. Funding and Resource Availability

Financial resources are essential for hiring qualified personnel, acquiring counseling tools, and running awareness programs. Funding also supports ICT-based counseling innovations such as online career assessments and digital mental health resources.

3. Personnel Competence and Availability

A qualified counselor should hold a degree in Guidance and Counseling or Educational Psychology, along with certification from CASSON. Professional competence ensures that counselors can address academic, vocational, and personal-social issues effectively.

4. Infrastructure and Facilities

Counseling requires a private, comfortable, and confidential environment.

Facilities should include assessment tools, reference materials, and access to ICT resources.

5. Awareness and Utilization

Need for Student Awareness: Students must know about the existence and benefits of counseling services. Regular orientation sessions and publicity campaigns help build awareness.

Availability of Tools

The effectiveness of guidance and counseling services in senior secondary schools is significantly influenced by the availability, adequacy, and accessibility of tools that support the delivery of these services. In the educational context, "tools" refer to both tangible and intangible resources that enable counselors to carry out their functions efficiently. In Port Harcourt Metropolis, variations in tool availability between public and private schools have led to significant differences in service quality, affecting student awareness, utilization, and satisfaction with counseling programs.

Financial Support for Counseling Services

Financial support is the lifeblood of effective guidance and counseling programs. Regardless of the quality of personnel, policy frameworks, or student willingness, without adequate funding, counseling services risk being poorly implemented, inconsistently delivered, and unsustainable.

In the Nigerian context and particularly within Port Harcourt Metropolis, the issue of financial support represents one of the biggest barriers to the effective implementation of guidance and counseling in

senior secondary schools. While the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013) clearly mandates the provision of counseling services in all schools, it does not stipulate specific budgetary allocations or enforcement mechanisms for adequate funding.

Sources of Financial Support for Counseling Services

Counseling units in Nigerian secondary schools typically draw funding from multiple sources:

a. Government Allocations

Federal and State Governments provide funding for public schools through the annual education budget.

In Rivers State, this funding is administered by the Ministry of Education, which may allocate resources for equipment, training, and personnel salaries.

b. School Budgets

School administrations may set aside a portion of internally generated revenue (IGR), especially in fee-paying schools, for counseling programs.

Private schools often dedicate more consistent budgets to counseling than public schools.

c. Donor Agencies and NGOs

Non-governmental organizations, community-based groups, and international agencies (e.g., UNICEF, UNESCO) occasionally support counseling programs, particularly in mental health awareness or life skills training.

d. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Programs

Companies in Port Harcourt especially oil and gas firms sometimes sponsor career fairs, mentorship programs, or provide ICT tools for counseling units.

2. Importance of Financial Support

Adequate financial support ensures:

1. Procurement of Tools and Materials – Including assessment kits, career information resources, and technology for e-counseling.
2. Professional Development – Funding for workshops, seminars, and advanced training programs.
3. Personnel Motivation – Allowances or salary enhancements to attract and retain qualified counselors.
4. Program Sustainability – Ensuring initiatives like peer mediation clubs or mental health campaigns run consistently.
5. Infrastructure Development – Establishing and maintaining dedicated counseling offices.

Financial support is not merely a logistical matter it is the foundation upon which all other aspects of guidance and counseling rest. In Port Harcourt's public schools, the lack of dedicated funding has led to under-equipped offices, unmotivated personnel, and limited student outreach. In contrast, better-funded private schools demonstrate how consistent investment translates into robust, impactful counseling services. Bridging this funding gap is essential to achieving equitable and effective counseling across all senior secondary schools in the metropolis.

Statement of the Problem

Empirical and anecdotal findings indicate that guidance and counseling services in senior secondary schools of Port Harcourt Metropolis are suboptimal. Many schools reportedly lack qualified counselors, appropriate facilities, and adequate counseling programs. Additionally, students may not fully

utilize existing services due to lack of awareness or cultural misconceptions surrounding counseling. School administrators often prioritize academic activities over counseling functions, and counselors themselves are frequently overburdened with other teaching duties.

This state of affairs raises critical concerns regarding the implementation quality of guidance and counseling services and their effectiveness in addressing students' academic, social, and psychological needs. Without proper evaluation, these problems risk continuing unnoticed, ultimately impairing students' development and success.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to evaluate the effective implementation of guidance and Counseling services in secondary schools in Port Harcourt metropolis Rivers State. Specifically, the objective is to

1. To examine the extent to which availability of tools affects the implementation of guidance and Counseling services in senior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis
2. To examine the extent to which availability of finances affects the effective implementation of guidance and Counseling services in senior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis

Research Questions

The study will be guided by the following questions:

1. To what extent does the availability of tools affect the effective implementation of guidance and Counseling services in secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis?
2. To what extent does availability of finance affect the effective implementation of the guidance and Counseling services in Port Harcourt Metropolis?

Hypothesis

1. There is no significant difference between the availability of tools and the implementation of guidance and counseling services in secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis.
2. There is no significant difference between the availability of finance and the effective implementation of guidance and counselling services in secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design, which was one of the most widely used approaches in educational and social science research. The descriptive survey design was appropriate because it allowed the researcher to gather data from a large and diverse population at a single point in time in order to describe existing conditions, opinions, perceptions, and practices without manipulating the research variables. The target population for this study comprised 65,000 senior secondary school students of classes one to three (SS1–SS3). This included day and boarding schools, as well as faith-based and secular institutions. The counselor population within these schools was estimated at about 350 individuals. This figure included professionally trained guidance counselors as well as teacher-counselors subject teachers who had been assigned counseling duties without formal counseling qualifications. This study employed a simple random sampling technique to select participants from the target population. Random sampling was appropriate because it ensured that every individual in the population had an equal and independent chance of being selected, thereby minimizing selection bias and improving the representativeness of the sample. The total sample size was 440 including students and counselors

The sample size for students was determined using the Yamane (1967) formula for finite populations at a 95% confidence level. This approach was both statistically robust and logistically feasible, ensuring that the findings could be generalized to the larger population of students and counselors in Port Harcourt Metropolis. By using this sampling strategy, the study obtained a balanced and credible dataset for evaluating the implementation of guidance and counseling services in Port Harcourt senior secondary schools. The primary data collection tool for this study was a structured questionnaire developed by the researcher titled Evaluation of Implementation of Guidance and Counselling Services in Senior Secondary Schools Questionnaire (EIGCSSSQ). The questionnaire was structured on a 4-point rating scale of Very High Extent, High Extent, Low Extent and Very Low Extent. To ensure the instrument measured what it was intended to measure, content validity was established through expert review. The draft questionnaire was submitted to two experts in Educational Psychology/Guidance and Counseling. Data collected were coded and entered into SPSS (Version 27) for analysis. The analysis involved both descriptive and inferential statistics: Descriptive statistics (frequency counts, percentages, means, and standard

deviations) were used to summarize demographic data and general responses. Independent samples t-test was used to test hypotheses and determine whether there were statistically significant differences in the implementation of guidance and counseling services between public and private schools.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Question 1: To what extent are the objectives of guidance and counseling services achieved in senior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis?

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation statistics of opinions of respondents on the extent to which objectives of guidance and counseling services are achieved in senior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis

Item	Mean (\bar{x})	SD	t-cal	t-crit (0.05)	Sig. (p)	Decision
Counseling objectives align with student needs	3.22	0.79	2.15	1.96	0.032	Significant
Services promote students' academic and personal growth	3.30	0.82	2.48	1.96	0.014	Significant
Counseling programs address career and behavioral issues	3.16	0.88	2.10	1.96	0.037	Significant
Counseling sessions contribute to student discipline	3.05	0.91	1.82	1.96	0.070	Not Significant
Counseling outcomes are regularly evaluated	2.78	0.94	1.25	1.96	0.134	Not Significant
Grand Mean / Evaluation	3.10					Moderately Effective

The overall mean of 3.10 shows that the objectives of guidance and counseling services are *moderately achieved*. However, the absence of systematic evaluation of counseling outcomes and irregular follow-up procedures hinder full effectiveness. Statistical analysis shows that three of the five items are significant at $p < 0.05$, suggesting that while program objectives are understood, their full realization remains partial.

Research Question 2: To what extent is funding adequate for effective implementation of guidance and counseling services?

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation statistics of opinions of respondents on the extent to which funding is adequate or effective implementation of guidance and counseling services in senior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis

Item	Mean	SD	t-cal	t-crit (0.05)	Sig. (p)	Decision
Government budget for counseling programs	2.70	0.90	1.60	1.96	0.115	Not Significant
School financial support for counseling units	2.83	0.88	1.77	1.96	0.081	Not Significant
Availability of funds for counselor training	2.64	0.93	1.28	1.96	0.201	Not Significant
Support from NGOs and external donors	3.00	0.81	2.02	1.96	0.045	Significant
Funding for counseling tools and materials	2.71	0.86	1.43	1.96	0.155	Not Significant
Grand Mean / Evaluation	2.78					Ineffective

With a grand mean of 2.78, financial support for counseling services was evaluated as inadequate and ineffective. The t-test results confirm that four out of five funding indicators are statistically insignificant ($p > 0.05$), implying that financial constraints remain a critical barrier to

effective program implementation. Schools rely primarily on internal resources with minimal government intervention, which severely limits program reach and quality.

Test of Hypotheses

H₀₁: There is no significant difference between the mean responses of practicing guidance counsellors and students on the extent to which counseling objectives are effectively achieved in senior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis.

Table 3:

Respondents	N	\bar{X}	SD	DF	p (approx.)	t-calculated	t-critical ($\alpha = 0.05$)	Decision
Counsellors	20	3.24	0.82		0.3954	0.849	1.97	Fail to reject H ₀₁
Students	374	3.08	0.86	392				

At the 0.05 level of significance and 392 degrees of freedom, the calculated *t*-value of 0.85 is less than the critical *t*-value of 1.97. The null hypothesis is therefore accepted. This result indicates that there is no statistically significant difference between the mean responses of counsellors and students on the extent to which counselling objectives are achieved. Both groups generally rated the achievement of guidance and counseling objectives as moderate, implying that program outcomes are only partially realized. Evaluatively, the result suggests that implementation processes have not yet attained optimal effectiveness and that both groups experience similar operational realities.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference between the mean responses of practising guidance counsellors and students on the adequacy of funding for guidance and counseling services.

Table 4:

Respondents	N	\bar{X}	SD	DF	p (approx.)	t-calculated	t-critical ($\alpha = 0.05$)	Decision
Counsellors	20	2.79	0.91		0.8477	0.192	1.97	Fail to reject H ₀₂
Students	374	2.75	0.89	392				

At 0.05 level of significance with 392 degrees of freedom, the calculated *t*-value (0.19) is less than the critical value (1.97). Hence, the null hypothesis is accepted. This finding implies that counsellors and students share the same perception that funding for guidance and counseling services is inadequate. Evaluatively, the lack of differential perception indicates that the shortage of financial resources is systemic and widely felt across stakeholders. This aligns with reports by Nwokolo and Anyamene (2017), who identified financial constraints as the most persistent barrier to effective school counseling implementation in Nigerian secondary schools.

Discussion of Findings

Achievement of Counselling Objectives

The study revealed that the achievement of counselling objectives in senior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis is moderate. Both counsellors and students agreed that counselling has contributed to students' academic, career, and personal-social development, but not to an optimal extent. This shows that the goals of guidance and counselling have only been partially realised. It can therefore be concluded that, although counselling services exist in most schools, their effectiveness is limited by irregular programme implementation, insufficient instructional support, and inadequate supervision. This agrees with Eze and Okafor (2018), who reported that school counselling outcomes in Rivers State are achieved only to a moderate level due to weak institutional backing.

The study found that the achievement of guidance and counselling objectives in senior secondary schools within Port Harcourt Metropolis is moderate. Both counsellors and students agreed that while counselling has contributed to students' academic performance, career decision-making, and personal-

social development, its objectives have not been fully realized. This suggests that guidance and counselling programmes are present in form but lack consistent implementation and institutional backing. Evaluatively, this points to partial goal attainment and underutilisation of the counselling framework within the school system. Eze and Okafor (2018) similarly reported that guidance objectives in Rivers State schools are achieved only to a moderate extent due to poor implementation and limited policy enforcement. Thus, there is an urgent need to strengthen programme integration, monitoring, and accountability mechanisms.

Adequacy of funding

The findings indicated that the level of funding for guidance and counselling services is generally low. Counsellors and students reported that there are no dedicated budgetary provisions for counselling activities, and that materials are often purchased personally by counsellors or improvised by schools. The result showed that the mean ratings of both groups did not differ significantly, confirming a uniform experience of financial constraint. Hence, it can be concluded that the inadequacy of funds has a direct negative influence on the quality of counselling delivery, staff training, and maintenance of tools in Port Harcourt Metropolis. This finding supports Nwokolo and Anyamene (2017), who identified lack of financial support as a major hindrance to effective counselling service implementation in Nigerian schools.

The result of the study revealed that the level of funding for guidance and counselling services in senior secondary schools is low. Both counsellors and students agreed that the financial provisions for counselling are inadequate, with no distinct budgetary allocations for materials, seminars, or professional development. The implication is that most counsellors rely on personal or improvised resources to execute their duties. Evaluatively, this finding demonstrates systemic neglect of counselling as a core component of school operations, making it vulnerable to underperformance. This agrees with Nwokolo and Anyamene (2017), who emphasised that lack of financial support from school authorities remains the most significant obstacle to effective counselling practice in Nigeria. Consequently, sustainable improvement in counselling services requires dedicated financial allocations and external partnerships to supplement government efforts.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, the study concludes that guidance and counselling services in senior secondary schools within Port Harcourt Metropolis are moderately effective but structurally weak. Both counsellors and students agree that the programme contributes positively to students' academic, career, and social development, but its impact remains limited by inadequate financial resources, insufficient personnel, lack of facilities, and inconsistent procedural frameworks.

The absence of significant differences between the perceptions of counsellors and students reflects a unified understanding of these weaknesses and demonstrates that the observed limitations are systemic, not individual. Evaluatively, this suggests that effective implementation of guidance and counselling services requires holistic institutional strengthening through policy enforcement, financial investment, personnel recruitment, and infrastructural support. Without these, counselling services will remain underutilised and fail to achieve their intended developmental and preventive functions within the school system.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

1. The Rivers State Ministry of Education should provide specific and regular budgetary allocations to sustain guidance and counselling programmes in all public secondary schools.
2. Schools should be equipped with standard counselling rooms, psychological test kits, ICT-based career guidance software, and relevant instructional materials to enhance service quality.

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