

ROLE OF COUNSELLING IN ENHANCING FUNCTIONAL EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Functional education aims to equip learners with practical skills and knowledge that are directly applicable to their lives and careers. This paper explores the concept of Counselling, crucial role of counselling in enhancing functional education by addressing students' psychological, emotional, and social needs, and aligning educational experiences with real-world applications. Through an examination of counselling strategies and their impact on educational outcomes, this paper highlights how counselling can facilitate a more effective and holistic approach to functional education. Functional education emphasizes practical skills and knowledge that prepare individuals for effective participation in society. Counselling plays a pivotal role in this educational approach by addressing the psychological, emotional, and social needs of students, enabling them to harness their potential fully. This paper explores the integral role of counselling in functional education, examining how counselling strategies can be applied to foster student development, enhance learning outcomes, and address challenges that hinder educational effectiveness. The discussion includes the significance of counselling in educational settings, its impact on functional education, and practical recommendations for integrating counselling services into educational institutions.

Keywords: Counselling, education, social well-being, functional education

Introduction

In the contemporary world, education is increasingly recognized not just as a pathway to personal and professional development but also as a critical tool for societal progress.

Functional education, which emphasizes practical skills, problem-solving abilities, and adaptability, is essential in preparing individuals to meet the challenges of the 21st century. However, despite the significant investments in education systems, many students still struggle to attain the level of functionality required to thrive in today's dynamic environment (Brown & Lent, 2019). This gap often stems from various personal, psychological, and social challenges that hinder their ability to fully engage with and benefit from the educational process.

Counselling has emerged as a vital support system within educational settings, addressing the myriad challenges that students face. The role of Counselling in education goes beyond academic guidance; it encompasses the emotional, psychological, and social well-being of students. providing a safe space for students to express their concerns, Counselling helps them develop resilience, self-awareness, and coping strategies (Kolb, 2014). This holistic approach ensures that students are not only equipped with academic knowledge but also possess the emotional and psychological tools necessary to apply their learning in real-world contexts.

The integration of counselling into the educational framework is particularly crucial in enhancing functional education. Counsellors work with students to identify and overcome barriers to learning, such as anxiety, low self-esteem, and social difficulties, which can impede their academic performance and overall development. Additionally, counselling fosters critical life skills such as decision-making, communication, and interpersonal relationships, all of which are essential components of functional education (Kim & Seo, 2018).

In many educational systems, particularly in developing countries, the role of counselling is often underutilized or overlooked. However, research has shown that when Counselling services are effectively integrated into the educational process, there is a marked improvement in students' academic performance, social adjustment, and overall well-being (Steinmayr, Weidinger, Schwinger, & Spinath, 2019). This highlights the need for educational institutions to prioritize counselling as a key component of functional education.

This conference paper explores the critical role of Counselling in enhancing functional education. It examines the various ways in which Counselling can help students' personal and academic development, discusses the challenges faced in implementing Counselling services in educational institutions, and provides recommendations for integrating Counselling into the broader educational framework. Through a comprehensive analysis of the interplay between Counselling and functional education, this paper aims to underscore the importance of a holistic approach to education that prepares students not only for academic success but also for life beyond the classroom.

Functional education encompasses educational practices designed to develop skills and competencies that are directly applicable to students' lives. This includes vocational training, life skills education, and experiential learning opportunities that bridge the gap between academic content and real-world applications (American School counselor Association, 2019). The goal is to produce graduates who are not only knowledgeable but also capable of applying

their learning in practical contexts.

Functional education aims to equip learners with practical skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary for meaningful participation in their communities and the wider society. It contrasts with traditional education, which often emphasizes theoretical knowledge without immediate real-world application (Darlin, Cook & Oser, 2020). The core of functional education is to bridge the gap between learning and practical application, preparing students to solve real-life problems, contribute to their communities, and succeed in the workforce.

Counselling, as a professional discipline, focuses on assisting individuals in achieving personal, academic, and career goals in addressing psychological, social, and emotional challenges. In view of functional education, Counselling becomes essential in supporting students as they navigate the demands of acquiring practical skills and knowledge. This paper explores the multifaceted role of Counselling in functional education, emphasizing how it can enhance student engagement, address individual differences, and promote overall well-being.

Concept of Counselling

It is a process where an individual, couple or family meets with a trained professional counsellor to talk about issues and problems that they are facing in their lives. professional Counselling is confidential and non-judgmental. Counselling can provide people with the opportunity to share their views, be heard and gain new perspectives on their situation and experiences. Counselling can help people to gain clarity surrounding issues. Together with their counsellor people identify and work towards achieving the desired outcomes and goals for Counselling. Counselling is a professional relationship that empowers diverse individuals, families, and groups to accomplish mental health, wellness, education, and career goals (Kim & Seo, 2018).

Role of Counselling in Functional Education

Enhancing Student Engagement and Motivation: One of the primary roles of Counselling in functional education is to enhance student engagement and motivation. Functional education requires active participation from students as they learn to apply theoretical knowledge to practical situations. Counselling can help students recognize the relevance of their education to their future goals, thereby increasing their intrinsic motivation to learn. Career Counselling can guide students in understanding the practical applications of their education, helping them make informed decisions about their career paths. Connecting their academic pursuits with real-world opportunities, students are more likely to stay engaged and motivated. Through Counselling, students can develop personalized learning plans that align with their strengths, interests, and future aspirations. This individualized approach fosters a sense of ownership over their education, further enhancing engagement (National Center for Education, 2021).

Addressing Individual Differences: Students come from diverse backgrounds with varying abilities, interests, and challenges. Counselling plays a crucial role in addressing these

individual differences to ensure that all students benefit from functional education. Counselors work with teachers to implement differentiated instruction strategies that accommodate the diverse learning needs of students. Identifying students' strengths and weaknesses, counselors can help educational experiences to ensure that every student has the opportunity to succeed. Counselling is vital in providing students with special needs, ensuring that they receive appropriate accommodations and interventions. This is critical in functional education, where practical skills are often emphasized, and students with special needs may require additional assistance to develop these skills (Hommelhoff, Schröder, & Niessen, 2020).

Promoting Social and Emotional Development: Functional education is not solely about academic achievement; it also focuses on developing social and emotional skills that are essential for success in life. Counselling supports this aspect of education by promoting the social and emotional well-being of students. Counselling helps students develop emotional resilience, enabling them to cope with challenges and setbacks that they may encounter in their education and personal lives. Emotional resilience is particularly important in functional education, where students are often required to work collaboratively and solve complex problems. Through counselling, students can learn effective conflict resolution and interpersonal skills, which are essential for teamwork and collaboration. These skills are critical in functional education settings, where group work and practical applications are common (Fall, Holden, & Marquis, 2017).

Supporting Academic Achievement: While functional education emphasizes practical skills, academic achievement remains an important component. Counselling plays a key role in supporting students' academic success especially addressing barriers to learning and providing strategies for improvement. Counsellors assist students in developing effective study habits, time management skills, and goal-setting strategies that enhance their academic performance. Addressing academic challenges early, Counselling helps prevent students from falling behind and encourages continuous progress. For students who are at risk of academic failure, Counselling provides targeted interventions that address the underlying causes of their difficulties. This may include counselling for personal issues, such as family problems or mental health concerns, that are impacting their academic performance (Kin & Henry, 2021).

Facilitating Career Readiness: A key goal of functional education is to prepare students for successful careers. Counselling plays a critical role in facilitating career readiness by helping students develop the necessary skills and attitudes for the workforce. Counselling can support the development and implementation of career development programs that provide students with the tools and resources needed to succeed in their chosen careers. This includes resume writing workshops, interview preparation, and job search strategies. Counsellors can help students identify and pursue work-based learning opportunities, such as internships and apprenticeships, that provide practical experience and enhance their employability (Osher, Kidron, Brackett, Dymnicki, Jones, & Weissberg, 2016).

Personal Development and Self-Awareness: Counselling supports students in understanding their strengths, weaknesses, interests, and values. Helping students develop self-awareness, counsellors enable them to make informed decisions about their educational and career paths. This alignment of personal goals with educational objectives enhances the relevance and effectiveness of the learning experience (Ertelt, Schulz, & Frey, 2022).

Academic and Career Guidance: Counsellors provide essential guidance on academic choices and career planning. Offering career assessments, educational planning, and advice on vocational training, counsellors help students select courses and extracurricular activities that align with their career aspirations. This guidance ensures that students' educational experiences are relevant to their future goals (Kin & Henry, 2021). In the Nigerian environment, academic and career guidance plays a crucial role in addressing common concerns such as high unemployment rates, career mismatches, and poor academic performance.

Practical ways through which Counselling can help resolve these issues include:

- i. *Career Awareness Programs:* Schools and universities can organize career days and workshops where professionals from various industries interact with students, providing real-world insights into career opportunities. This helps bridge the knowledge gap between academic learning and job market demands.
- ii. *Personalized Career Assessments:* Through psychometric tests and career interest inventories, counselors can help students identify their strengths, weaknesses, and interests, guiding them toward career paths that align with their abilities. This is particularly important in Nigeria, where many students select courses based on parental pressure or societal expectations rather than personal aptitude.
- iii. *Educational Planning and Skill Development:* Counselors can guide students in choosing the right subject combinations that match their career aspirations. They can also encourage skill development in entrepreneurship, vocational training, and digital literacy, which are essential for Nigeria's evolving job market.
- iv. *Guidance on Admission and Scholarships:* Many students in Nigeria face challenges in accessing higher education due to a lack of information on admission processes, available scholarships, and alternative pathways like technical education. Counselors can provide clarity on these opportunities, reducing the dropout rate and ensuring informed decisions.
- v. *Support for Special Needs and Disadvantaged Students:* Career Counselling can be tailored to support students with disabilities, those from low-income backgrounds, and marginalized groups, helping them access education and career opportunities suited to their circumstances.
- vi. *Entrepreneurship and Self-Employment Counselling:* Given the limited formal employment opportunities in Nigeria, counselors can introduce students to entrepreneurship, teaching them how to start small businesses and leverage government initiatives like the National Youth Investment Fund (NYIF). By implementing these

Counselling strategies, students in Nigeria can make informed academic and career choices, reducing unemployment, enhancing job readiness, and fostering national development.

Emotional and Psychological Support: The emotional and psychological well-being of students is critical for effective learning. Counselling addresses issues such as stress, anxiety, and personal challenges that may hinder students' academic performance and engagement. providing support and coping strategies, counsellors create a conducive learning environment that enhances students' ability to focus and succeed (Kolb, 2014). In the Nigerian educational environment, students face various emotional and psychological challenges that impact their academic success. Factors such as economic hardship, family pressures, academic competition, peer influence, and insecurity contribute to stress and anxiety among students. Counselling plays a crucial role in addressing these concerns through practical interventions:

- i. *School-Based Counselling Programs* – Schools can establish dedicated Counselling units where trained professionals provide regular support to students experiencing stress, anxiety, or personal struggles. This can be achieved by organizing one-on-one sessions, group therapy, and workshops on mental well-being.
- ii. *Stress Management and Coping Strategies* – Counselors can teach students practical techniques such as mindfulness, time management, and relaxation exercises to help them manage stress effectively. For example, Nigerian schools can introduce stress relief programs before major exams to reduce test anxiety.
- iii. *Parental Involvement and Family Counselling* – Many Nigerian students face family-related stress due to economic difficulties, parental expectations, and household conflicts. Counselors can work with parents to improve communication and understanding, helping to create a supportive home environment.
- iv. *Career Guidance and Personal Development* – Nigerian students often experience anxiety regarding career choices and future prospects. Counselling can provide career guidance, aptitude assessments, and mentorship programs to help students make informed decisions about their educational and professional paths.
- v. *Peer Counselling and Support Groups* – Establishing peer Counselling initiatives within schools and universities allows students to support one another under the supervision of trained professionals. This creates a network where students feel comfortable discussing their struggles with their peers in a structured setting.
- vi. *Addressing Trauma and Insecurity-Related Stress* – Given the challenges of insecurity in some parts of Nigeria, including insurgency and communal conflicts, many students may experience trauma. School counselors can provide trauma-focused Counselling and resilience-building workshops to help affected students cope and reintegrate into their academic pursuits. By implementing these Counselling strategies, Nigerian educational institutions can create a more supportive and mentally healthy learning environment,

ultimately improving students’ academic performance and overall well-being.

Enhancing Social Skills and Interpersonal Relationships: Functional education often requires collaboration and effective communication. Counselling programs that focus on social skills development, conflict resolution, and interpersonal relationships prepare students for successful interactions in both academic and professional settings. These skills are crucial for fostering a positive learning environment and building professional networks (Kin & Henry, 2021).

Facilitating Experiential Learning Opportunities: Counsellors play a role in connecting students with internships, apprenticeships, and other experiential learning opportunities that provide practical experience and enhance the relevance of their education. These experiences are essential for bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application (Dahir, Cinotti, & Feirsen, 2019).

Challenges in Implementing Counselling in Functional Education

While the benefits of counselling in functional education are clear, there are several challenges to implementing Counselling services effectively. These challenges include:

1. *Limited Resources:* Many educational institutions, particularly in low-income areas, may lack the resources to provide comprehensive counselling services. This can limit the ability of counsellors to address the diverse needs of students.
2. *Stigma around Counselling:* In some cultures, there may be a stigma associated with seeking counselling, which can prevent students from accessing the support they need. Overcoming this stigma requires concerted efforts to promote the value of counselling and normalize its use in educational settings.
3. *Integration with Educational Practices:* Integrating counselling into the educational framework can be challenging, particularly in schools that prioritize academic achievement over student well-being. There is a need for a cultural shift that recognizes the importance of Counselling in achieving educational goals.

Suggestions

To maximize the impact of counselling in functional education, the following suggestions are proposed:

1. *Increase Access to Counselling Services:* Educational institutions should prioritize the availability of Counselling services in allocating sufficient resources and training staff to provide effective support.
2. *Promote a Holistic Approach to Education:* Schools should adopt a holistic approach to education that values both academic achievement and student well-being. This can be achieved by integrating counselling services into the educational framework and promoting their use among students.

3. *Foster Collaboration Between Educators and Counsellors:* Collaboration between educators and counsellors is essential for addressing the diverse needs of students. Regular communication and joint planning can ensure that counselling services are aligned with educational goals.
4. *Raise Awareness and Reduce Stigma:* Efforts should be made to raise awareness about the benefits of counselling and reduce the stigma associated with seeking help. This can be achieved through campaigns, workshops, and open discussions that normalize the use of counselling services.

Conclusion

Counselling plays a vital role in functional education by supporting the psychological, emotional, and social needs of students. Through counselling, students can develop the skills and attitudes necessary for success in both their academic and personal lives. Addressing individual differences, enhancing engagement, and promoting career readiness, counselling contributes to the overall effectiveness of functional education. To fully realize the benefits of counselling, educational institutions must overcome the challenges of implementation and prioritize the integration of counselling services into their educational frameworks. Through these efforts, functional education can fulfill its promise of preparing students for meaningful and productive lives.

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