

## THE ROLE OF COUNSELLING UNITS AND ESSENTIAL RESOURCES IN ACHIEVING BASIC EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES FOR PROGRESS

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### Abstract

*The paper examined the importance of counselling units and essential educational resources for the realization of basic education in Nigeria. It identified the key challenges faced by the educational system and suggests strategies for overcoming these barriers to ensure quality education for all children. The realization of basic education in Nigeria faces numerous challenges, including inadequate resources, infrastructure, and professional support. Counselling units play a crucial role in supporting students' academic, social, and emotional development. However, the effectiveness of counselling services in Nigeria's educational system remains hindered by a lack of resources, insufficiently trained counselors, and socio-economic barriers.*

**Keywords:** *Role, Counselling, Units, Essential Resources, Achieving, Basic Education*

### Introduction

Basic education in Nigeria consists of the first nine years of schooling. It is fundamental and a key element for the country's social and economic development. The Nigerian government has committed to providing free, compulsory, and quality basic education, yet many children, especially in rural areas, remain out of school or drop out early (Federal Ministry of Education, 2021). 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. While various efforts have been made, challenges such as inadequate funding, lack of infrastructure, insufficient teaching materials, and a shortage of qualified teachers continue to plague the system. In addition, counselling services

within schools are often neglected, despite their significant role in improving students' academic performance, mental health, and overall well-being (Omotayo & Olaniyan, 2020). 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, (Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN), 2013, 2004). This paper explores the importance of counselling units and the necessary resources for achieving the goals of basic education in Nigeria, while also discussing the challenges and providing recommendations for progress.

### **Importance of Basic Education in Nigeria**

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.

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).

### **The Role of Counselling Units in Achieving Basic Education**

Counselling Units constitute essential part of educational institutions, providing services that support the emotional, social, and academic development of students. In the context of basic education in Nigeria, counselling services can address a range of issues, including career guidance, academic difficulties, behavioral problems, and mental health challenges (Adewumi & Adebayo, 2019). Effective counselling helps students navigate personal challenges, improves their self-esteem, and fosters resilience, which is critical in overcoming barriers to education such as poverty, cultural attitudes, and family issues (Adeyemo & Otutu, 2017).

In Nigeria, however, the establishment and functioning of counselling units in schools remain limited. Many schools lack trained counselors, and where they do exist, counselling services are often insufficiently funded or poorly integrated into the educational system (Ogunyemi & Adebayo, 2016). For counselling units to be effective, schools must prioritize their inclusion, ensuring that they are staffed with qualified professionals who are trained to address the specific needs of the students they serve.

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 behavioural 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.

### **Essential Resources Needed for Effective Implementation of Basic Education in Nigeria**

Achieving quality basic education requires adequate resources, including human, material, and financial resources. These resources are essential to ensure that children receive not only access to education but also the tools and support they need to succeed academically.

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; Ikechi, 2018; Oladele, 2018; Alex, 2019).
- 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; Ikechi, 2018; Oladele, 2018; Alex, 2019).
- iii. *Learning Materials and Resources:* Sufficient and up-to-date learning materials and resources are necessary for effective basic education. This includes textbooks,

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- workbooks, reference materials, teaching aids, and access to digital resources that enhance learning experiences, (Adebunmi, 2017; Ikechi, 2018; Oladele, 2018; Alex, 2019).
- iv. *Educational Materials*: Textbooks, teaching aids, and technology are vital for enhancing learning outcomes. The Nigerian education system suffers from a shortage of adequate educational materials, leading to a gap in the quality of education (Fashola & Bakare, 2021). Providing schools with up-to-date textbooks, computers, and other digital resources can enhance teaching and make learning more interactive and accessible.
  - v. *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; Ikechi, 2018; Oladele, 2018; Alex, 2019).
  - vi. *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; Ikechi, 2018; Oladele, 2018; Alex, 2019).
  - vii. *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; Ikechi, 2018; Oladele, 2018; Alex, 2019). The Nigerian government allocates a substantial portion of its budget to education, yet the allocation remains insufficient given the size and needs of the population. Prioritizing education in government spending and seeking international support are crucial steps in addressing the financial shortfalls faced by the sector (Okebukola, 2019).
  - viii. *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; Ikechi, 2018; Oladele, 2018; Alex, 2019).
  - ix. *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; Ikechi, 2018; Oladele, 2018; Alex, 2019).
  - x. **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; Ikechi, 2018; Oladele, 2018; Alex, 2019).

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; Ikechi, 2018; Oladele, 2018; Alex, 2019). 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; Ikechi, 2018; Oladele, 2018; Alex, 2019).

### **Challenges in Realizing Basic Education Goals in Nigeria**

Despite the significant efforts made by the Nigerian government, numerous challenges persist in achieving universal basic education.

1. *Inadequate Funding and Resources:* One of the most significant obstacles is the chronic underfunding of education. According to UNESCO, Nigeria spends only about 5.7% of its GDP on education, which is below the recommended 15-20% (UNESCO, 2020). This leads to insufficient infrastructure, inadequate teaching resources, and a lack of proper counselling services.
2. *Socioeconomic Barriers:* Socioeconomic factors such as poverty, child labor, and gender discrimination continue to limit access to education, particularly in rural areas. Many children are either unable to attend school due to financial constraints or drop out because of family pressures (Adewumi & Adebayo, 2019). The lack of support systems in schools, including counselling services, further exacerbates these issues. Counselling units often lack adequate resources, including funding, staffing, and materials. This hinders their ability to provide comprehensive counselling services to students, (Egbo, 2015; Florence, et al., 2020; Uju, 2020; David, et al., 2021; Bashari, 2022; Mamman, 2022; Omoyemiju, 2022; Sarkasku and Umar, 2022; Daudi et al., 2023).
3. *Cultural and Social Norms:* In some regions of Nigeria, cultural beliefs discourage girls from attending school or prioritizing education over domestic responsibilities. This affects the enrollment and retention rates of female students, particularly in the northern parts of the country (Ogunyemi & Adebayo, 2016). 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 (Egbo, 2015; Florence, et al., 2020; Uju, 2020; David, et al., 2021; Bashari, 2022; Mamman, 2022; Omoyemiju, 2022; Sarkasku and Umar, 2022; Daudi et al., 2023).
4. *Inadequate Training and Professional Development for Counselors:* While counselling services are vital for the emotional and psychological well-being of students, the lack of trained counselors remains a major issue. Many schools either do not have counselling units or lack personnel who are adequately trained to handle the challenges that students face (Omotayo & Olaniyan, 2020). 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 (Egbo, 2015; Florence, et al., 2020; Uju, 2020; David, et al., 2021; Bashari, 2022; Mamman, 2022; Omoyemiju, 2022; Sarkasku and Umar, 2022; Daudi et al., 2023).

5. *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 (Egbo, 2015; Florence, et al., 2020; Uju, 2020; David, et al., 2021; Bashari, 2022; Mamman, 2022; Omoyemiju, 2022; Sarkasku and Umar, 2022; Daudi et al., 2023).
6. *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 (Egbo, 2015; Florence, et al., 2020; Uju, 2020; David, et al., 2021; Bashari, 2022; Mamman, 2022; Omoyemiju, 2022; Sarkasku and Umar, 2022; Daudi et al., 2023).
7. *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 (Egbo, 2015; Florence, et al., 2020; Uju, 2020; David, et al., 2021; Bashari, 2022; Mamman, 2022; Omoyemiju, 2022; Sarkasku and Umar, 2022; Daudi et al., 2023).
8. *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 (Egbo, 2015; Florence, et al., 2020; Uju, 2020; David, et al., 2021; Bashari, 2022; Mamman, 2022; Omoyemiju, 2022; Sarkasku and Umar, 2022; Daudi et al., 2023).
9. *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 (Egbo, 2015; Florence, et al., 2020; Uju, 2020; David, et al., 2021; Bashari, 2022; Mamman, 2022; Omoyemiju, 2022; Sarkasku and Umar, 2022; Daudi et al., 2023).

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

### **Strategies for Overcoming Challenges and Advancing Basic Education in Nigeria**

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

- 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 (Egbo, 2015; Florence, et al., 2020; Uju, 2020; David, et al., 2021; Bashari, 2022; Mamman, 2022; Omoyemiju, 2022;

- Sarkasku and Umar, 2022; Daudi et al., 2023).
- 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 (Egbo, 2015; Florence, et al., 2020; Uju, 2020; David, et al., 2021; Bashari, 2022; Mamman, 2022; Omoyemiju, 2022; Sarkasku and Umar, 2022; Daudi et al., 2023).
  - 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, (Egbo, 2015; Florence, et al., 2020; Uju, 2020; David, et al., 2021; Bashari, 2022; Mamman, 2022; Omoyemiju, 2022; Sarkasku and Umar, 2022; Daudi et al., 2023).
  - 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 (Egbo, 2015; Florence, et al., 2020; Uju, 2020; David, et al., 2021; Bashari, 2022; Mamman, 2022; Omoyemiju, 2022; Sarkasku and Umar, 2022; Daudi et al., 2023).
  - 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 (Egbo, 2015; Florence, et al., 2020; Uju, 2020; David, et al., 2021; Bashari, 2022; Mamman, 2022; Omoyemiju, 2022; Sarkasku and Umar, 2022; Daudi et al., 2023).
  - 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 (Egbo, 2015; Florence, et al., 2020; Uju, 2020; David, et al., 2021; Bashari, 2022; Mamman, 2022; Omoyemiju, 2022; Sarkasku and Umar, 2022; Daudi et al., 2023).
  - 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 (Egbo, 2015; Florence, et al., 2020; Uju, 2020; David, et al., 2021; Bashari, 2022; Mamman, 2022; Omoyemiju, 2022; Sarkasku and Umar, 2022; Daudi et al., 2023).
  - 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 (Egbo, 2015; Florence, et al., 2020; Uju, 2020; David, et al., 2021; Bashari, 2022; Mamman, 2022; Omoyemiju, 2022; Sarkasku and Umar, 2022; Daudi et al., 2023).
  - x. *Leveraging Technology*: In light of the digital divide, investing in technology for education can offer new ways to reach students, especially in rural areas. E-learning platforms,

digital libraries, and mobile apps can supplement traditional teaching methods and enhance the learning experience for students across Nigeria

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.

### Conclusion

Achieving basic education for all in Nigeria requires concerted efforts from the government, communities, and international partners. Counselling units and essential resources are integral to supporting students and ensuring their academic and emotional well-being. While challenges remain, effective solutions that prioritize funding, professional development, and community involvement can help overcome barriers and ensure that every Nigerian child has access to quality education. As the government continues to invest in education and address the underlying issues, the vision of universal basic education in Nigeria can become a reality.

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