



Guidance Services and Mental Health of Secondary School Students in Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study investigated the relationship between guidance services and the mental health of secondary school students in Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District, Nigeria. Three research questions and three corresponding null hypotheses guided the conduct of the study. A correlational research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study consisted of 21,625 senior secondary two students in public secondary schools in the Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District, Nigeria. A sample of 496 Senior Secondary Two students was selected for the study using a multistage sampling procedure to ensure adequate representation. A researcher-made instrument titled "Guidance Services and Mental Health of Secondary School Students' Questionnaire" (GSMHSSQ) was used for data collection. The face validity of the instrument was established by experts in guidance and counseling and measurement and evaluation at the University of Uyo, Nigeria. The reliability of the instrument was determined using the internal consistency method, which yielded an overall reliability index of 0.76. The research questions and their corresponding hypotheses were answered and tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation statistics. The results revealed a significant relationship between orientation, counseling, placement services, and the mental health of secondary school students. Based on the findings, it was concluded that guidance services such as orientation, counseling, and placement services play a significant role in influencing the mental health of secondary school students. Three relevant recommendations were made, among which is that guidance

counselors should be employed in public secondary schools in the Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District and should partner with the Counselling Association of Nigeria, Akwa Ibom State Chapter, to provide comprehensive information on mental health, coping strategies, and available support services to empower students to maintain and improve their mental health.

Keywords: guidance services, orientation, counseling, placement, mental health

Introduction

In the context of this study, mental health refers to a student's emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It influences how individuals think, feel, and behave, as well as how they cope with stress, relate with others, and make decisions in everyday life. Mental health is not merely the absence of mental illness; rather, it reflects a positive state of functioning in which individuals are able to realize their abilities, manage normal life pressures, work productively, and contribute meaningfully to their communities. As such, mental health plays a vital role in promoting overall quality of life and effective adjustment within different social and environmental contexts. Mental health is crucial at every stage of life, from childhood and adolescence through adulthood (World Health Organization, 2017). During childhood and adolescence, sound mental health supports learning, emotional regulation, identity formation, and healthy social interaction. In adulthood, it enhances productivity, interpersonal relationships, and the ability to cope with occupational and family responsibilities. Poor mental health, on the other hand, may manifest in emotional distress, impaired decision-making, reduced academic or occupational performance, and difficulties in maintaining stable relationships.

The World Health Organization (WHO) (2017) identified key indices of mental health, namely emotional well-being, psychological well-being, and social well-being. Emotional well-being pertains to an individual's ability to recognize, express, and regulate emotions appropriately, especially during challenging situations. Individuals with good emotional well-being are better able to cope with frustration, anxiety, and stress without becoming overwhelmed. Psychological well-being is associated with self-acceptance, autonomy, personal growth, resilience, and a clear sense of purpose in life. It reflects how individuals perceive themselves and their capacity to pursue meaningful goals despite obstacles. Social well-being, on the other hand, involves the ability to establish and maintain satisfying interpersonal relationships, cooperate with others, and experience a sense of belonging and



acceptance within family, school, workplace, or community environments. Together, these indices provide a comprehensive understanding of mental health as a multidimensional construct essential for healthy personal development and social functioning.

Guidance is a combination of services aimed at assisting an individual to gain self-understanding necessary to realize his/her potential in life. Guidance encompasses problem-solving and understanding of one's abilities and environment so that his/her development can take place in tandem with the environment (Modo, 2023). It involves undertaking multi-faceted services to ensure that the developmental goal of an individual is realized. According to Ukaegbu (2022), guidance services include orientation, information, appraisal, counseling, placement, and referral, as well as follow-up and evaluation services.

However, guidance services of interest in this study are orientation service, counseling service, and placement service. Orientation service is designed to help students transition into school life and adjust to the academic and social environment. As highlighted by Nwafor and Okafor (2017), effective orientation programs can help reduce anxiety among students by providing them with the information and resources they need to succeed. These programs can play a significant role in alleviating the stress students may experience when starting secondary school. By introducing them to the school's policies, academic expectations, and social dynamics, students can be better equipped to manage challenges and maintain good mental health.

Counseling services may be the most direct form of support for students' mental health. School counselors may provide emotional and psychological support, which could help students address personal issues such as stress, relationship problems, and academic concerns. Akinade and Ojo (2019) highlighted the positive impact of counseling on students' mental health, stating that counseling interventions can reduce feelings of anxiety and depression. Through one-on-one or group sessions, counselors can help students develop coping strategies and improve their emotional resilience.

A placement service is designed to help students identify their strengths and weaknesses by guiding them towards subjects and career paths that align with their interests and abilities (Ezeh and Okeke, 2020). When students are placed in academic areas that match their abilities, they are more likely to experience a sense of achievement and satisfaction. This, in turn, can reduce stress and enhance their mental well-being since the students may feel more confident and competent in their academic pursuits.



Thus, the need for this study in the Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District is justified by the increasing concerns regarding the mental health of secondary school students in the area. With the rising pressures on students and the limited mental health resources available, guidance services can play a critical role in promoting students' mental well-being. This study provided necessary information on the extent to which guidance services can predict the mental health of secondary school students in the Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District, Nigeria. The inclusion of well-structured guidance services, namely orientation, counseling, and placement services, can go a long way in addressing the mental health needs of students in order to foster a conducive academic environment for success.

Statement of the Problem

Increasing attention has been directed toward the psychological well-being of adolescents as schools across many parts of the world continue to record rising cases of emotional distress, behavioral difficulties, and social adjustment problems among students. Adolescence represents a critical developmental stage characterized by rapid physical, emotional, and social changes that often expose young people to stress, confusion, and vulnerability. Academic competition, peer pressure, family instability, exposure to social media influences, and changing societal expectations have further intensified the challenges faced by secondary school students. When these pressures are not effectively managed, students may experience anxiety, depression, poor self-esteem, and difficulty forming healthy interpersonal relationships, all of which can negatively affect their academic performance and future adjustment.

In Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District, concerns about the mental health of secondary school students have continued to grow as adolescents increasingly encounter stressors related to academic demands, examination pressure, economic hardship within families, peer influence, and exposure to risky behaviors. Schools are expected to provide supportive environments that foster students' holistic development; however, reports of indiscipline, emotional instability, bullying, truancy, and declining motivation toward learning suggest that many students struggle to cope effectively with personal and social challenges. These realities have raised questions about whether adequate support mechanisms exist within schools to promote students' emotional balance, psychological resilience, and social well-being.

School guidance services were introduced as essential educational support systems aimed at assisting students to understand themselves, adjust successfully to

school life, and make informed academic, personal, and vocational decisions. However, the extent to which these services relate to emotional well-being, psychological adjustment, and social functioning among students has not been sufficiently established, particularly in Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District. It is against this background that the problem of this study was posed: What is the relationship between guidance services (orientation, counselling, and placement services) and the mental health of secondary school students in Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District?

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between guidance services and the mental health of secondary school students in Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District, Nigeria. In specific terms, the study sought to determine:

- i. The relationship between orientation services and the mental health of secondary school students.
- ii. The relationship between counselling services and the mental health of secondary school students.
- iii. The relationship between placement services and the mental health of secondary school students.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the conduct of the study:

- i. What is the relationship between orientation services and the mental health of secondary school students?
- ii. What is the relationship between counseling services and the mental health of secondary school students?
- iii. What is the relationship between placement services and the mental health of secondary school students?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses guided the conduct of the study:

- i. There is no significant relationship between orientation services and the mental health of secondary school students

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- ii. There is no significant relationship between counseling services and the mental health of secondary school students.
- iii. There is no significant relationship between placement services and the mental health of secondary school students.

Scope of the Study

This study was carried out in the Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District, Nigeria. Only Senior Secondary Two students in public secondary schools in the 2024/2025 academic session participated in the study. Guidance services, namely orientation, counseling, and placement services, served as the independent variables of the study, while mental health served as the dependent variable.

Theoretical Framework

Biopsychosocial Theory by George L. Engel (1977)

The Biopsychosocial Theory was propounded by George L. Engel in 1977 as a comprehensive framework for understanding health and mental well-being. The theory posits that mental health is shaped by the interaction of biological, psychological, and social factors rather than a single cause. The biological component includes genetic makeup, brain functioning, and physical health, which may predispose individuals to certain mental conditions. The psychological aspect involves cognitive processes, emotions, personality traits, and coping skills, which determine how individuals respond to stress. The social dimension focuses on environmental influences such as family, peers, school climate, and cultural expectations that shape behavior and emotional adjustment.

The theory is relevant to this study as it provides a holistic explanation of students' mental health by showing how multiple factors interact to influence their well-being. It explains that students' psychological outcomes are not determined by a single factor but by the combined effect of their personal characteristics, emotional capacity, and social environment. This supports the need for comprehensive guidance services such as orientation, counselling, information, referral, and follow-up services, which collectively address the diverse needs of students. The theory further highlights the importance of collaboration among teachers, counsellors, parents, and health professionals in promoting students' mental health. By emphasizing a multidimensional approach, the theory justifies the role of school-based interventions in helping students cope with academic stress, social challenges, and personal issues, thereby enhancing their overall adjustment and well-being.



Person-Centered Theory by Carl Rogers (1951)

The Person-Centered Theory was propounded by Carl Rogers in 1951 and emphasizes that individuals have an inherent drive toward self-actualization and personal growth. The theory holds that a supportive environment characterized by empathy, genuineness, and unconditional positive regard promotes psychological well-being. Rogers argued that individuals are capable of understanding and resolving their own problems when provided with the right psychological climate. He explained that a healthy self-concept develops through acceptance and positive interactions, while criticism and conditions of worth may lead to emotional maladjustment. The theory also highlights the concepts of congruence and incongruence, where harmony between the real self and ideal self leads to emotional stability, while a mismatch results in anxiety and stress. In counseling, the therapist provides a non-directive and supportive environment that enables individuals to explore their feelings, gain self-awareness, and make meaningful decisions.

The theory is relevant to this study as it underscores the importance of guidance services in creating a supportive and student-centered environment that enhances mental health, emotional stability, and overall psychological development. It further explains how services such as orientation, counseling, and information provision can help students feel understood, accepted, and guided, thereby improving their ability to cope with academic and social challenges. By promoting empathy, active listening, and non-judgmental support, guidance programs based on this theory can foster resilience, self-confidence, and positive adjustment among students.

Design of the Study

The study adopted a correlational research design. According to Selman (2021), a correlational design is appropriate for investigating the extent to which two or more variables are related without manipulating them. It helps the researcher to determine patterns of association between variables in their natural setting. The choice of a correlational design is considered suitable for this study because it allowed the researcher to determine the relationship between guidance services and the mental health of secondary school students in the Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District, Nigeria.

Population of the Study

The population of the study consisted of 21,625 Senior Secondary 2 students in public secondary schools in the Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District, Nigeria.



There are 89 public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District, Nigeria. Out of the 89 public secondary schools, only 23 schools have counseling units, and the schools are situated in 7 local government areas, namely Ibesikpo/Asutan, Nsit Ibom, Uyo, Itu, Ibiono Ibom, Etinan, and Uruan (Akwa Ibom State Secondary Education Board, Uyo, 2026).

Sample and Sampling Technique

A sample of 496 senior secondary two students in public secondary schools was selected for the study using a multistage sampling procedure. In the first instance, each local government area constituted a cluster. The simple random sampling technique (cap and draw) was used to select 2 schools from each LGA except Nsit Ibom, which has only one secondary school with a resident guidance counselor. This brought the total number of schools to 11. Finally, a proportional random sampling procedure was used to select 10% of senior secondary two students from each of the sampled public secondary schools in the 6 LGAs selected for the study. The determination of the sample size of 496 senior secondary two students was based on the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table for sample size determination.

Instrumentation

A researcher-made instrument, titled “Guidance Services and Mental Health of Secondary School Students’ Questionnaire” (GSMHSSSQ), was used for data collection. The instrument was divided into two sections. Section A focused on guidance services such as orientation, counseling, and placement services. It consisted of 24 items. Eight items were used to measure each of the guidance services. Section B consisted of 20 items, which were used to elicit responses from secondary school students on their mental health. The items on the instrument were responded to on a four-point rating scale such as Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD), weighted 4, 3, 2, and 1, respectively.

Validation of the Instrument

The face validation of the instrument was determined by two experts in the Department of Guidance and Counselling and one expert in Measurement and Evaluation, Department of Psychological Foundations of Education, Faculty of Education, University of Uyo, Nigeria. The experts critically examined the items for relevance, clarity, appropriateness, and language suitability. Their observations, suggestions, and corrections were considered and incorporated into the final version of the instrument.

Reliability of the Instrument

The reliability of the instrument was determined using the internal consistency method. To achieve this, the instrument was administered to a sample of 30 SS Two students who were not included in the main study but were part of the population of the study. Data obtained were analyzed using the Cronbach Alpha statistic, and an overall reliability index of 0.76 was obtained, implying that the instrument is reliable.

Method of Data Analysis

The research questions and their corresponding hypotheses were answered and tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation statistics. All the hypotheses were tested at a .05 alpha level of significance. All the data collated were subjected to analysis via the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

Results

Table 1: Pearson Product Moment Correlation coefficient between orientation service and mental health of secondary school students in Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District, Nigeria

Variables	n	r	p-value	Remarks
Orientation Service Relationship;	496	.674	.000	Strong Positive
Mental Health				Significant

Table 1 reveals a correlation coefficient of $r = .674$ with a sample size of 496. This indicates a strong positive relationship, suggesting that higher levels or better quality of orientation services are associated with improved mental health among students. Furthermore, the test of hypothesis one shows that the p-value of .000 is less than the .05 level of significance. Hence, the hypothesis that states that there is no significant relationship between orientation service and mental health of secondary school students is rejected based on the decision rule.

Table 2: Pearson Product Moment Correlation coefficient between counselling service and mental health of secondary school students in Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District, Nigeria

Variables	n	r	p-value	Remarks
Counselling Service Relationship;	496	.782	.000	Strong Positive
Mental Health				Significant

As shown in table 2, the correlation coefficient between counseling service and mental health is $r = .782$ with a sample size of 496, indicating a strong positive relationship. This suggests that higher levels or better quality of counseling services are associated with significantly improved mental health among students. Furthermore, the test of hypothesis two shows that the p-value of .000 is less than the .05 level of significance. Hence, the hypothesis that states that there is no significant relationship between counseling services and the mental health of secondary school students is rejected based on the decision rule.

Table 3: Pearson Product Moment Correlation coefficient between placement service and mental health of secondary school students in Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District, Nigeria

Variables	n	r	p-value	Remarks
Placement Service Relationship;	496	.891	.000	Very Strong Positive
Mental Health				Significant

As shown in the table 3, the correlation coefficient between placement service and mental health is $r = .891$ with a sample size of 496, indicating a very strong positive relationship. This suggests that higher levels or better quality of placement services are closely associated with improved mental health among students. Furthermore, test of hypothesis three shows that the p-value of .000 is less than .05 level of significance. Hence, the hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between placement service and mental health of secondary school students is rejected based on decision rule.

Discussion of Findings

Analysis of data on research question one and its corresponding null hypothesis one revealed that there is a significant positive relationship between orientation service and mental health. This implies that the level or quality of orientation services provided to secondary school students influences their psychological well-being. Students who experienced more comprehensive and structured orientation services demonstrated better mental health outcomes, while those with limited or less effective orientation interventions exhibited lower levels of mental well-being. This pattern suggests that orientation services contribute to improved coping with academic, social, and personal challenges by providing students with guidance, information, and emotional support. This finding is consistent with the study by Nwosu and Eze (2019) but contrasts with the report of Okon and Edem (2018), who found no significant relationship between orientation activities and mental health among students in selected schools in Akwa Ibom State.

Analysis of data on research question two and its corresponding null hypothesis two revealed that there is a significant positive relationship between counseling services and mental health. This implies that access to and utilization of counseling services substantially influence the psychological well-being of secondary school students. Students who frequently engaged with counseling services demonstrated higher mental health scores, while those with limited exposure to counseling exhibited lower levels of psychological adjustment. This suggests that counseling services provide students with opportunities to express emotions, receive guidance, and develop adaptive coping strategies for academic, social, and personal challenges. This finding is consistent with the study by Adeyemi and Musa (2019) but contrasts with the report of Chike and Umeh (2020), who observed no significant relationship between counseling services and mental health among students in selected schools in Nigeria.

Analysis of data on research question three and its corresponding null hypothesis three revealed that there is a significant positive relationship between placement service and mental health. The implication is that the availability and effectiveness of placement services influence the psychological well-being of secondary school students. Students who had better access to placement services demonstrated higher mental health scores, while those with limited access exhibited lower levels of psychological adjustment. This suggests that placement services play a crucial role in helping students navigate academic, vocational, and social challenges by providing guidance, structured opportunities, and support for decision-making. This finding is consistent with the study by Onyekachi and Afolabi



(2020) but contrasts with the report of Adewuyi *et al.* (2019), who found no significant relationship between placement interventions and mental health among adolescents.

Conclusion

In view of the findings of the study, it was concluded that guidance services such as orientation, counseling, and placement services play a significant role in influencing the mental health of secondary school students. This underscores the importance of maintaining and enhancing these services to support students' psychological well-being effectively.

Implications for Guidance and Counseling

The findings of this study have several important counseling implications for counselors working with secondary school students. First, the significant relationship between orientation service and mental health suggests that counselors should prioritize structured orientation programs that help students adjust to the school environment. For students who are new or experiencing difficulty adapting, counselors may need to provide guided support, social integration activities, and information on school resources to promote psychological well-being.

Second, the finding that counseling services significantly relate to mental health indicates the need for accessible and continuous counseling support. Counselors should implement interventions that help students manage stress, resolve personal and academic conflicts, and develop emotional resilience. Tailored sessions may be necessary for students facing specific emotional challenges or high-stress situations. Third, the fact that placement services significantly relate to mental health highlights the importance of guiding students into appropriate academic tracks or programs. Counselors should assess students' abilities, interests, and career aspirations to ensure that academic and career placements reduce stress and enhance well-being. Students struggling with subject selection or career decisions may require individualized guidance and decision-making support.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, here are three recommendations:

- i. Government should employ guidance counselors in all the public secondary schools in the Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District to strengthen orientation services, which help students to adjust smoothly to the school environment, thereby promoting better mental health.



- ii. Guidance counselors working in public secondary schools in the Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District should endeavor to provide timely psychological support to students, addressing stress, anxiety, and other mental health challenges.
- iii. Secondary school students in the Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District should always seek counseling for effective placement services that align with their abilities and interests, reducing academic stress and promoting mental well-being.

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GUIDANCE SERVICES AND MENTAL HEALTH OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS' QUESTIONNAIRE (GSMHSSSQ)

INSTRUCTION: Choose your response from the number of alternatives by ticking appropriately in the box provided.

KEY: The response options are Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD)

SECTION A: GUIDANCE SERVICES

S/N	Orientation Service	SA	A	D	SD
1.	I participated in an orientation programme when I first joined this school.				
2.	The orientation programme helped me understand the rules of the school.				
3.	Orientation helped me adjust to my new school environment.				
4.	I was introduced to my school facilities during orientation.				
5.	Orientation activities helped reduce my anxiety as a new student.				
6.	I was given a student handbook or guide during the orientation.				
7.	Orientation sessions helped me to know where to seek help when needed.				
8	Orientation provided helpful advice on how to succeed in school.				
	Counselling Service				
9.	I know who the school counsellor is in my school.				



10.	The school counsellor is available when I need someone to talk to.				
11.	I feel comfortable sharing my problems with the school counsellor.				
12.	Counselling sessions have helped me deal with emotional issues.				
13.	Counselling in my school has helped improve my behaviour.				
14.	I feel more emotionally stable after attending counselling.				
15.	I feel supported by the counselling service during stressful periods.				
16.	The counselling service in my school is important for student well-being.				
	Placement Service				
17.	Placement services helped me make informed choices.				
18.	The school placement service helps students avoid academic failure.				
19.	I was consulted before decisions were made about my academic placement.				
20.	Placement decisions are made without bias.				
21.	My placement in school supports my future career goals.				
22.	The placement service in my school helps students plan for the future.				
23.	I was given guidance on choosing the right subject when I joined this school.				
24.	The school counsellor helped me understand my interests before placement.				



SECTION B: STUDENTS' MENTAL HEALTH

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD
1.	I often feel sad even when nothing is wrong.				
2.	I have trouble sleeping at night because of worries.				
3.	I get irritated more often than I used to.				
4.	I feel nervous before going to school.				
5.	Most times, I can take time off work when my family needs me.				
6.	I find it hard to concentrate during lessons.				
7.	I usually feel lonely even when I am among friends.				
8.	I often feel like no one understands me.				
9.	I worry a lot about my academic performance.				
10.	I often feel anxious in social situations.				
11.	I get discouraged easily when I fail.				
12.	I feel unsafe in my school environment.				
13.	I feel mentally tired most of the time.				
14.	I often have headaches without a clear reason.				
15.	I worry that people will laugh at me if I make a mistake.				
16.	I prefer to stay alone even when others are around.				
17.	I usually experience mood swings during the day.				
18.	I have lost interest in most of the things I used to enjoy.				
19.	I sometimes feel like running away from home				
20.	I feel mentally weak to cope with life's challenges.				