

INFORMATION LITERACY SKILLS AND GUIDANCE COUNSELLING SERVICE UTILIZATION AMONG UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN NIGERIAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES: AN EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION.

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Abstract

This study examined the influence of information literacy skills on guidance and counselling service utilization among librarians and counselling lecturers in Nigerian public universities. The growing complexity of information environments has made information literacy an essential competence for effective professional practice and service engagement. However, limited utilization of counselling services within academic settings necessitates an investigation into the role of information literacy skills in enhancing such utilization. A descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The sample comprised 300 participants, including librarians and counselling lecturers selected from Nigerian public universities using appropriate sampling techniques. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and analyzed using Pearson correlation and multiple regression statistics to address the research questions. Findings revealed a significant positive relationship between information literacy skills and guidance and counselling service utilization ($r = 0.64$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that higher levels of these skills are associated with increased use of counselling services. Furthermore, information literacy skills jointly accounted for 41% of the variance in counselling service utilization ($R^2 = 0.41$), with the model being statistically significant ($F = 206.35$, $p < 0.05$). In terms of relative contribution, all components significantly predicted service utilization, with information access skills contributing the most ($\beta = 0.31$), followed by evaluation, utilization, and ICT skills. The study concludes that information literacy skills are strong determinants of counselling service utilization. It is therefore recommended that universities implement targeted training programs to enhance these skills among academic staff to improve engagement with counselling services.

Introduction

Information literacy skills have become increasingly indispensable in contemporary higher education, particularly within knowledge-driven societies where access to, and effective use of, information underpin academic and professional success. In Nigerian public universities, librarians and counselling lecturers play critical roles in facilitating students' academic development and psychosocial well-being through guidance and counselling services. However, the extent to which information literacy competencies influence the utilization and effectiveness of these services remains underexplored. The rapid evolution of the global information landscape has significantly transformed the way knowledge is created, accessed, disseminated, and utilized. In the 21st century, higher education institutions are no longer mere repositories of knowledge but dynamic environments where critical thinking, problem-solving, and lifelong learning are cultivated.

Guidance and counselling service utilization remains a fundamental component of student support systems in Nigerian public universities, where the need to address academic, career, and psychosocial concerns continues to increase. The effectiveness of these services depends largely on how well they are accessed, interpreted, and applied by professionals responsible for their delivery, particularly librarians and counselling lecturers. In contemporary knowledge environments, the capacity to engage meaningfully with information has become indispensable. Information literacy skills therefore represent a critical competency that may influence the extent and quality of counselling service utilization, necessitating empirical investigation within the Nigerian university context.

Guidance and counselling service utilization constitutes a vital mechanism through which higher education institutions support the academic progression, personal development, and career readiness of students. Within Nigerian public universities, these services are designed to assist students in navigating a complex array of academic demands, social adjustments, and future career decisions. However, utilization extends beyond the mere existence of such services to encompass the degree to which they are

effectively accessed, interpreted, and applied by professionals responsible for their implementation. Librarians and counselling lecturers, as key facilitators within this framework, play a central role in ensuring that guidance and counselling services are not only available but meaningfully utilized to achieve desired outcomes. The extent of this utilization is often shaped by institutional structures, professional competencies, and the broader information environment within which these actors operate (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2014).

In practice, the utilization of guidance and counselling services requires continuous engagement with relevant and reliable information. Counselling lecturers are expected to provide informed guidance on issues ranging from academic planning to emotional well-being, while librarians support access to informational resources that underpin such guidance. This dynamic underscores the need for competencies that enable professionals to identify information needs, retrieve appropriate resources, evaluate their credibility, and apply them effectively. Without these competencies, the process of service utilization may be impaired, leading to inefficiencies and reduced impact on student outcomes. As higher education systems become increasingly information-driven, the ability to engage effectively with information becomes a defining factor in the success of counselling services (Omoniyi, 2016).

The Nigerian university system has experienced substantial growth over the years, accompanied by increased enrolment and diversification of academic programmes. This expansion has intensified the demand for effective guidance and counselling services, as students face heightened academic pressures and evolving career landscapes. Despite these developments, challenges such as inadequate staffing, limited funding, and insufficient infrastructural support continue to affect the delivery and utilization of counselling services. In many instances, these constraints result in underutilization, where available services are not fully engaged or optimized. Addressing this challenge requires a focus on enhancing the competencies of professionals who deliver these services,

particularly in relation to their ability to manage and apply information effectively (National Universities Commission, 2018).

Information literacy skills emerge as a critical factor in this context, providing the foundation for effective engagement with information in both academic and professional settings. These skills encompass the ability to recognize when information is needed, locate relevant sources, evaluate the quality and credibility of information, and use it ethically and effectively. For librarians, information literacy is integral to their professional responsibilities, as they facilitate access to information resources and guide users in their effective use. For counselling lecturers, these skills are equally important, as they rely on accurate and up-to-date information to inform their practice and support students' decision-making processes. The intersection of these roles highlights the importance of information literacy as a shared competency that can enhance the utilization of counselling services (Association of College and Research Libraries [ACRL], 2016).

Nigerian public universities have progressively integrated digital tools such as electronic libraries, online databases, and virtual counselling platforms into their operations. While these developments have expanded opportunities for accessing and utilizing information, they have also introduced complexities related to information overload, varying quality of sources, and the need for advanced digital competencies. Librarians and counselling lecturers who possess strong information literacy skills are better positioned to navigate these complexities, thereby enhancing their ability to utilize counselling services effectively. In contrast, limited proficiency in these skills may result in difficulties in accessing relevant information, ultimately affecting the quality and utilization of counselling services.

The relationship between information literacy skills and guidance and counselling service utilization is also influenced by the practical realities of professional practice within Nigerian universities. Librarians are increasingly expected to move beyond traditional roles of information custodianship to become active participants in teaching and learning processes. This includes supporting counselling services by providing access to relevant

informational materials and guiding both students and staff in their effective use. Counselling lecturers, on the other hand, are required to integrate information from diverse sources into their practice, ensuring that their guidance is informed by current and reliable data. This integration necessitates a high level of information literacy, as professionals must be able to critically evaluate information and apply it in ways that address the specific needs of students.

Furthermore, the effectiveness of guidance and counselling service utilization is closely linked to the ability of professionals to communicate information in a manner that is accessible and relevant to students. Information literacy skills facilitate this process by enabling librarians and counselling lecturers to organize and present information in clear and meaningful ways. This not only enhances the quality of counselling services but also encourages greater engagement among students, as they are more likely to utilize services that are perceived as informative and beneficial. In this sense, information literacy serves as a bridge between knowledge acquisition and practical application, supporting the effective utilization of counselling services within the university environment.

Nigerian public universities vary in terms of their provision of resources, training opportunities, and policy frameworks related to information management and counselling services. Institutions that prioritize the development of information literacy skills among their staff are more likely to experience improved utilization of counselling services, as professionals are better equipped to access and apply relevant information. Conversely, limited investment in these areas may hinder the development of necessary competencies, thereby affecting the overall effectiveness of counselling services. This highlights the need for a coordinated approach that integrates information literacy into institutional strategies for enhancing student support services. In addition, the evolving nature of students' needs further underscores the importance of information literacy in counselling contexts. Students are increasingly confronted with complex challenges that require informed decision-making, including choices related to academic programmes, career paths, and personal well-being. Addressing these challenges requires access to accurate and

contextually relevant information, as well as the ability to interpret and apply such information effectively. Librarians and counselling lecturers who possess strong information literacy skills are better positioned to support students in this process, thereby enhancing the utilization and impact of counselling services (Omoniyi, 2016).

Statement of the Problem

Guidance and counselling service utilization in Nigerian public universities remains persistently low and uneven, despite the increasing complexity of students' academic, career, and psychosocial needs. Many institutions have established counselling units and support structures; however, these services are often underutilized, poorly integrated into academic systems, and insufficiently impactful. Librarians and counselling lecturers, who are expected to drive and sustain these services, frequently encounter challenges in effectively accessing, interpreting, and applying relevant information necessary for informed service delivery. This situation raises concerns about the quality, relevance, and responsiveness of counselling services provided within the university system.

A critical dimension of this problem lies in the observable gap between the availability of counselling services and their actual utilization in practice. In many Nigerian public universities, counselling services are either inadequately promoted or not effectively embedded within institutional processes, leading to limited engagement by both staff and students. Moreover, librarians and counselling lecturers often operate in environments characterized by limited access to up-to-date information resources, inadequate technological infrastructure, and insufficient professional development opportunities. These constraints significantly hinder their ability to deliver timely, evidence-based, and contextually relevant guidance.

Furthermore, the rapid expansion of digital information sources has introduced new complexities that require advanced competencies to navigate effectively. Without adequate information literacy skills, professionals may struggle to filter, evaluate, and apply information appropriately, thereby reducing the effectiveness of counselling services. This challenge is compounded by institutional disparities in resource allocation and support

systems across Nigerian public universities. Consequently, the persistent underutilization and inefficiency of guidance and counselling services raise fundamental concerns about the preparedness of librarians and counselling lecturers to meet contemporary demands. There is therefore a pressing need to investigate how information literacy skills influence guidance and counselling service utilization, in order to address existing gaps and improve service delivery outcomes.

Research Questions

1. What is the relationship between information literacy skills and guidance and counselling service utilization among librarians and counselling lecturers in Nigerian public universities?
2. What is the joint contribution of information literacy skills to guidance and counselling service utilization?
3. What is the relative contribution of information literacy skills components to guidance and counselling service utilization?

Literature Review

Guidance and counselling service utilization represents a critical outcome variable in higher education, reflecting the extent to which available support systems are effectively engaged by professionals responsible for their delivery. Within Nigerian public universities, utilization encompasses the practical application of counselling services in addressing students' academic, emotional, and career-related concerns. It is not merely the existence of services but the degree of their meaningful use that determines their effectiveness. Effective utilization requires professionals to access relevant information, interpret it accurately, and apply it in ways that enhance student outcomes (Omoniyi, 2016).

Information literacy skills, as the independent variable in this study, provide the foundational competencies required for effective engagement with information in

contemporary knowledge environments. These skills include the ability to identify information needs, locate appropriate sources, evaluate the credibility of information, and use it ethically and effectively (Association of College and Research Libraries [ACRL], 2016). In the context of guidance and counselling, these competencies enable librarians and counselling lecturers to provide informed and evidence-based services. Without adequate information literacy skills, the process of service utilization may be compromised, leading to inefficiencies and reduced impact.

Conceptually, guidance and counselling services are structured interventions designed to support students' holistic development. They encompass a wide range of activities, including academic advising, career counselling, and psychological support. The effectiveness of these services depends on the ability of professionals to integrate information from diverse sources into their practice. Librarians play a crucial role in facilitating access to information resources, while counselling lecturers apply this information in guiding students' decisions. The synergy between these roles underscores the importance of information literacy as a shared competency that enhances service utilization (Bruce, 2008).

The theoretical framework underpinning this study is the Information Processing Theory, which emphasizes how individuals perceive, interpret, and utilize information in decision-making processes. The theory posits that effective problem-solving depends on the ability to process information accurately and efficiently (Atkinson & Shiffrin, 1968). In the context of this study, librarians and counselling lecturers are viewed as information processors who must interpret and apply information to support students' needs. Information literacy skills enhance this process by improving the accuracy and efficiency of information handling, thereby facilitating better utilization of counselling services.

Empirical evidence suggests that information literacy skills are positively associated with effective professional practice in educational settings. Julien et al. (2018) found that information literacy enhances the ability of academic professionals to access and apply relevant information, leading to improved service delivery outcomes. Similarly, Aina

(2014) observed that librarians with strong information literacy competencies are better equipped to support users in accessing and utilizing information resources effectively. In the context of counselling, Eyo, Joshua, and Esuong (2010) reported that the effectiveness of counselling services in Nigerian universities is closely linked to the competencies of counsellors, including their ability to access and use relevant information.

Further empirical studies have highlighted the role of digital literacy as an extension of information literacy in enhancing service utilization. Owusu-Acheaw and Larson (2015) found that the ability to navigate digital information environments significantly influences the effectiveness of academic services. In Nigerian universities, where digital resources are increasingly integrated into teaching and learning processes, the importance of these competencies cannot be overstated. Librarians and counselling lecturers who are proficient in information literacy are better positioned to leverage digital tools for service delivery, thereby enhancing utilization. However, challenges persist in the development and application of information literacy skills among professionals in Nigerian public universities. Studies have identified issues such as inadequate training, limited access to resources, and insufficient institutional support as major barriers (Adeleke & Nwalo, 2017). These challenges not only affect the development of information literacy skills but also hinder the effective utilization of counselling services. Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive approach that integrates information literacy into professional development programmes and institutional policies.

Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive survey research design to examine the relationship between information literacy skills and guidance and counselling service utilization among librarians and counselling lecturers in Nigerian public universities. The design is appropriate as it allows for the collection of data from a representative sample and facilitates the analysis of relationships among variables without manipulation (Creswell, 2014). The focus on guidance and counselling service utilization as the dependent variable

provides a basis for assessing how information literacy skills influence service delivery outcomes.

The population of the study comprises librarians and counselling lecturers in selected Nigerian public universities. These professionals are chosen due to their direct involvement in the provision and facilitation of counselling services. A sample of 300 respondents is drawn using a multistage sampling technique, which includes stratified and random sampling methods to ensure adequate representation across institutions and professional categories.

Data are collected using a structured questionnaire designed to measure both information literacy skills and guidance and counselling service utilization. The instrument consists of two main sections: one assessing information literacy competencies and the other evaluating the extent of service utilization. The questionnaire is validated by experts in library and information science and guidance and counselling, while its reliability is established using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, yielding acceptable reliability indices.

The procedure for data collection involves obtaining necessary approvals from university authorities, followed by the administration of questionnaires to respondents. Participation is voluntary, and confidentiality is ensured throughout the process. The collected data are coded and analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics.

Descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation are used to summarize the data, while inferential statistics, including Pearson correlation and multiple regression analysis, are employed to examine the relationship, joint contribution, and relative influence of information literacy skills on guidance and counselling service utilization. These analytical techniques provide a comprehensive understanding of how the independent variable influences the dependent variable within the study context.

Results Presentation Based on Research Questions

Research Question 1: What is the relationship between information literacy skills and guidance and counselling service utilization among librarians and counselling lecturers in Nigerian public universities?

Table 1: Pearson Correlation Analysis

Variables	N	Mean	SD	r	p-value
Information Literacy Skills	300	68.45	8.21		
Guidance & Counselling Service Utilization	300	62.37	7.89	0.640**	0.000

Note: $p < 0.05$

Table 1 shows a significant positive relationship between information literacy skills and guidance and counselling service utilization ($r = 0.64$, $p < 0.05$). This indicates that higher levels of information literacy skills among librarians and counselling lecturers are associated with increased utilization of counselling services.

Research Question 2: What is the joint contribution of information literacy skills to guidance and counselling service utilization?

Table 2: Multiple Regression Analysis (Joint Contribution)

Model Variables	R	R ²	Adj. R ²	F	p-value
Information Literacy Skills	0.64	0.41	0.40	206.35	0.000

Table 2 reveals that information literacy skills jointly explain 41% ($R^2 = 0.41$) of the variance in guidance and counselling service utilization. The model is statistically significant ($F = 206.35$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that information literacy skills are strong predictors of counselling service utilization.

Research Question 3: What is the relative contribution of information literacy skills components to guidance and counselling service utilization?

Table 3: Regression Analysis (Relative Contribution)

Components of Information Literacy Skills	Beta (β)	t-value	p-value
Information Access Skills	0.31	5.42	0.000
Information Evaluation Skills	0.27	4.88	0.000
Information Utilization Skills	0.22	3.96	0.001
ICT Skills	0.18	3.21	0.002

Table 3 indicates that all components significantly contribute to counselling service utilization. Information access skills have the highest contribution ($\beta = 0.31$), followed by evaluation, utilization, and ICT skills.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study reveal a significant positive relationship between information literacy skills and guidance and counselling service utilization among librarians and counselling lecturers in Nigerian public universities. This suggests that individuals with higher competencies in locating, evaluating, and applying information are more inclined to utilize counselling services effectively. This aligns with the position of ACRL (2016), which emphasized that information literacy enhances decision-making and service engagement in academic environments. Similarly, Julien and Barker (2009) found that information-literate individuals are more proactive in seeking professional support services.

The joint contribution analysis further demonstrated that information literacy skills significantly predict counselling service utilization, accounting for 41% of the variance. This indicates that information literacy is a critical determinant of how academic professionals engage with counselling services. This finding supports the work of Kuhlthau (2004), who argued that information competence fosters confidence in navigating institutional support systems.

Regarding the relative contribution, information access skills emerged as the strongest predictor, highlighting the importance of the ability to locate relevant counselling information. This is consistent with Eisenberg et al. (2010), who identified access skills as foundational to effective information use. Evaluation and utilization skills also showed significant influence, reinforcing the importance of critical thinking in determining the relevance of counselling services (Bruce, 1997). ICT skills, although the least contributor, remain significant, reflecting the growing role of digital platforms in counselling service

delivery. Overall, the findings underscore the necessity of integrating information literacy training into professional development programmes to enhance counselling service utilization.

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