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RETHINKING ASSESSMENT, FEEDBACK, AND PSYCHOMETRICS FOR MODERN GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING: IMPLICATIONS FOR CAREER COUNSELING IN NORTH CENTRAL NIGERIA.

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ABSTRACT

This study examined "Rethinking Assessment and Feedback for Effective Guidance and Counselling in the Modern Era: Implications for Measurement and Career Counselling in North Central, Nigeria." Using a descriptive survey design grounded in literature and field observations from secondary schools, the study evaluated how current assessment and feedback practices influence school guidance services and student career decision-making. Findings reveal that most secondary schools rely on traditional testing methods focused on memorization and terminal examinations, offering limited insight into students' skills, interests, and career readiness. Guidance services suffer from a lack of standardized, culturally relevant measurement tools, alongside delayed, non-actionable feedback. Conversely, modern approaches—such as competency-based assessments, digital tools, and timely, specific feedback—significantly enhance student self-awareness and career decision-making. However, full implementation of these modern practices is hindered by systemic challenges, including inadequate counsellor training, lack of ICT infrastructure, and insufficient funding. The study concluded that effective modern guidance and counselling requires shifting from traditional testing to continuous, technology-driven, and competency-based assessment models. It recommends that governments fund school counselling units, institutions employ qualified counsellors, and educators receive training in modern assessment and feedback strategies.

Keywords: Rethinking Assessment, Feedback, Psychometric Measurement & Guidance and Counselling,

Introduction

Guidance and counselling in schools is a systematic process designed to help students understand themselves, develop their potential, and make informed decisions about academic, social, and career matters (Akinade, 2019). It serves as a bridge between the individual

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student and the complex demands of the school system and the larger society. In an era where the world of work is rapidly changing due to technology, globalisation, and economic shifts, the role of guidance and counselling has become even more critical. Students can no longer afford to make career choices based on guesswork or tradition. They need accurate information about themselves and about opportunities to fit meaningfully into society.

At the heart of effective guidance and counselling are two interwoven tools: assessment and feedback. Assessment refers to the systematic process of gathering information about a student's abilities, interests, personality traits, values, academic performance, and career maturity. This information is collected through tests, observations, interviews, inventories, and other measurement instruments. Feedback, on the other hand, is the process of communicating the results of assessment back to the student in a manner that promotes understanding, reflection, and positive action. Without proper feedback, assessment data remains meaningless. Without valid assessment, feedback becomes mere opinion. Together, they form the foundation upon which sound guidance and counselling is built.

Globally, the landscape of assessment and feedback has undergone a major transformation in the last two decades. The traditional model of assessment, which relied heavily on one-time, high-stakes examinations, is gradually being replaced by more continuous, competency-based, and data-driven approaches (Baker, 2021). Modern assessment recognises that human potential is multi-dimensional. A single score in Mathematics or English cannot tell us about a student's creativity, emotional intelligence, leadership potential, or vocational interests. As a result, schools and counselling centres now use a variety of tools including psychometric tests, aptitude batteries, interest inventories, portfolios, performance tasks, self-assessment scales, and digital learning analytics.

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This shift is driven by the understanding that education in the 21st century must prepare learners not just for examinations, but for life and work. Employers are no longer asking only for certificates. They are asking for problem-solvers, critical thinkers, and individuals who can adapt. Therefore, assessment must measure more than recall of facts. It must measure skills, attitudes, and readiness for the future. Feedback has also evolved significantly. In the past, feedback was limited to end-of-term report cards or comments written in red ink. Today, effective feedback is expected to be timely, specific, descriptive, and action-oriented.

Research by Hattie and Timperley (2007) demonstrates that feedback is one of the most powerful influences on student achievement. When students receive immediate feedback, they can identify gaps in their learning, correct misconceptions, and set realistic goals. In the context of guidance and counselling, feedback helps students to develop self-awareness. For example, when a student takes a career interest inventory and receives feedback indicating high scores in the investigative and social domains, the counsellor can guide the student toward careers in health, research, or education. This kind of feedback moves the student from confusion to clarity. Technology has further accelerated this change. Digital platforms, Computer-Based Testing, e-portfolios, and learning management systems now allow counsellors and teachers to track student progress in real time. Data analytics can reveal patterns in student performance, attendance, and engagement that would have been impossible to detect manually. This means that guidance can become more proactive rather than reactive. Instead of waiting until a student fails or drops out, counsellors can intervene early based on data.

Despite these global advances, the situation in Nigeria, and specifically in North Central Nigeria, presents a different picture. The guidance and counselling services in most primary

and secondary schools in the zone are still operating with outdated methods and limited resources. The Federal Ministry of Education (2018) in its policy document acknowledged that many schools lack functional counselling units, qualified personnel, and standardised testing materials. Most schools continue to depend on terminal examinations and occasional career talks as the main form of guidance. Career talks are often generic, delivered once a year, and do not take into consideration the individual differences of students. Measurement tools such as the Strong Interest Inventory, Career Maturity Inventory, or locally validated aptitude tests are either not available, too expensive, or not adapted to the Nigerian cultural context. Where these tools exist, they are often administered by teachers who have no formal training in guidance and counselling.

The implication of this gap is serious. Because students do not receive accurate assessment and meaningful feedback, many of them make career choices based on peer pressure, parental influence, or societal prestige rather than on a clear understanding of their own abilities and interests (Nwosu, 2020). A student who is gifted in technical skills may end up studying Law because "that is what people respect." Another student with strong artistic talent may be pushed into accounting because "there is money there." This mismatch between ability and career choice contributes to the high rate of job dissatisfaction, school dropout, and graduate unemployment that we see today.

North Central Nigeria, comprising Benue, Kogi, Kwara, Nasarawa, Niger, Plateau States and the FCT, faces additional unique challenges. The zone is characterised by cultural diversity, rural-urban disparities, and in some areas, insecurity that disrupts schooling. Many schools in rural communities do not have a single trained counsellor. Even in urban centres, the student-to-counsellor ratio is often 1000:1, far above the recommended 250:1. This makes

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individualised assessment and feedback almost impossible. Furthermore, there is a lack of research and funding to develop and validate assessment instruments that reflect the values, languages, and occupational structure of North Central Nigeria.

The modern era, however, presents both challenges and opportunities. The rise of ICT, the emphasis on 21st-century skills such as communication, collaboration, and digital literacy, and the persistent problem of youth unemployment all point to the urgent need for a new approach to guidance and counselling. Students today are exposed to more career options than any previous generation. From tech startups to agribusiness, from content creation to renewable energy, the possibilities are endless. But with more options comes more confusion. Without proper assessment and feedback, students can easily become overwhelmed. Digital platforms now make it possible to bridge some of these gaps. Online career assessment tools, virtual counselling sessions, and mobile feedback systems can reach students even in remote areas (Idowu & Oyekanmi, 2022). Data analytics can help school administrators identify students at risk and allocate counselling resources more efficiently. However, for these tools to be effective in North Central Nigeria, several conditions must be met. First, counsellors must be trained not only in counselling skills but also in the use of modern assessment and measurement tools. Second, assessment instruments must be validated for the Nigerian context to ensure cultural relevance. Third, schools must invest in basic ICT infrastructure and internet access.

It is also important to recognise that assessment and feedback in guidance and counselling are not ends in themselves. They are means to an end, which is to help students make better decisions and live more fulfilling lives. When assessment is done properly, it reveals a student's strengths and areas for growth. When feedback is given properly, it empowers the

student to take ownership of their learning and career path. In this way, guidance and counselling becomes a developmental process rather than a crisis intervention service.

Given the foregoing, it is clear that the current practices of assessment and feedback in many schools in North Central Nigeria are inadequate for the demands of the modern era. Relying on outdated methods in a fast-changing world is a disservice to students. There is a need to rethink, redesign, and reposition assessment and feedback practices to align with global best practices while remaining sensitive to local realities. It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to examine the rethinking of assessment and feedback for effective guidance and counselling in the modern era. Specifically, the study explored the implications of modern assessment and measurement approaches for career counselling in North Central Nigeria. The goal is to provide recommendations that will help schools, policymakers, and counselling professionals to adopt practices that are more valid, reliable, and useful for guiding the next generation of Nigerians.

Statement of the problem

Despite the recognised importance of guidance and counselling in schools, the processes of assessment and feedback in North Central Nigeria remain largely ineffective and outdated. The modern demand for evidence-based counselling requires that students be assessed using valid, reliable, and culturally appropriate instruments, and that they receive feedback that is timely and actionable. However, this is not the reality in most schools in the zone.

First, many schools still rely on terminal examinations and subjective teacher judgment as the primary means of assessing students. These methods fail to capture critical non-academic variables such as interests, aptitudes, personality, and career maturity that are essential for

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effective guidance. Also is the problem of a serious shortage of standardised measurement tools. Most of the psychometric instruments available were developed in other contexts and have not been adapted for Nigerian students. Where interest inventories and aptitude tests exist, they are often outdated, expensive, or administered by untrained personnel. This raises concerns about the accuracy of the data being used to counsel students. Again, feedback given to students is often delayed, vague, and not linked to career decision-making. In many schools, students only receive feedback at the end of the term in the form of report cards with little or no explanation on how to improve or what career path to follow. The consequence of these problems is that many students graduate with little understanding of their strengths, weaknesses, or suitable career paths. This has contributed to career mismatch, high rates of unemployment, and frustration among youths. Therefore, the central problem of this study is: To what extent are modern assessment and feedback practices being used for guidance and counselling in North Central Nigeria, and what are their implications for measurement and career counselling?

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Concept and Scope of Modern Assessment

Assessment in guidance and counselling is the systematic process of gathering, interpreting, and using information about an individual to understand and assist him. In the modern era, the concept of assessment has expanded far beyond giving examinations and recording scores. It is now viewed as a continuous, developmental, and multi-dimensional process aimed at revealing the whole person (Baker, 2021). The core idea behind modern assessment is that human beings are complex. A student cannot be reduced to one test score. Students differ in intelligence, interests, values, learning styles, emotional intelligence, and career aspirations. Therefore, assessment must capture this diversity. The scope of modern assessment in guidance covers four major domains: academic, psychological, social, and career. In the academic domain, modern assessment looks beyond final exams. It includes continuous assessment, class projects, portfolios, presentations, and practical demonstrations. This gives a more accurate picture of what a student knows and can do. In the psychological domain, it involves standardised tools to measure intelligence, aptitude, personality, and emotional maturity. These tools help counsellors understand why a student behaves or learns in a particular way (Akinade, 2019).

In the social domain, assessment considers peer relationships, leadership, teamwork, and adjustment to school life. Many career problems start from poor social skills, so this area cannot be ignored. In the career domain, modern assessment uses interest inventories, values scales, and career maturity tests to help students align their abilities with occupational choices (Super, 1990). This is critical in a time when career options are expanding rapidly due to technology and globalisation. feature of modern assessment is the competency-based approach. Competency-based assessment focuses on what the learner can demonstrate. It asks: Can the student solve problems? Can the student communicate effectively? Can the

student use digital tools? These are the skills employers demand today. This approach shifts attention from memorisation to application (Idowu & Oyekanmi, 2022).

Another feature is authenticity. Modern assessment uses real-life tasks such as internships, exhibitions, and simulations. For guidance purposes, this is important because it shows how a student will perform in actual work settings. A student who excels in a mock business project may be guided toward entrepreneurship.

Technology has also broadened the scope. Computer-Based Testing, online aptitude tests, e-portfolios, and learning analytics allow counsellors to collect and analyse data faster. These tools provide immediate reports that can guide counselling sessions (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Modern assessment is also inclusive and participatory. Students are involved through self-assessment and peer assessment. This builds self-awareness, which is the foundation of effective guidance. When students reflect on their own strengths and weaknesses, they become active partners in the counselling process.

Limitations of Traditional Assessment Methods

Traditional assessment methods have been the backbone of Nigerian education for decades. These include end-of-term examinations, weekly tests, and objective questions that emphasise recall. While they served a purpose in the past, they have serious limitations for modern guidance and counselling. The first limitation is overemphasis on rote memorisation. Traditional tests reward students who can cram and reproduce facts. They do not measure creativity, problem-solving, or critical thinking (Baker, 2021). In today's job market, employers want people who can innovate, not just recite. A student who scores high in Chemistry may still be unable to design a simple experiment.

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The second limitation is narrowness. Traditional assessment focuses almost entirely on cognitive ability. It ignores psychomotor skills, affective traits, interests, and values (Akinade, 2019). A student gifted in music, tailoring, or agriculture may be labelled "dull" because the test does not measure those talents. This leads to misdirection in career choice.

Third, traditional assessment is summative rather than formative. It occurs at the end of a term and is used for promotion. There is little room for feedback or correction before the final judgment (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). In guidance, this is problematic because early intervention is key. By the time a student fails, the damage may already be done.

Fourth, it is prone to stress and malpractice. Because so much depends on one exam, students experience high anxiety. Some resort to cheating. The result is that the score does not reflect true ability. This undermines the validity of data used for counselling.

Fifth, traditional tests lack cultural relevance. Many instruments used in Nigeria were developed in Western countries. They do not reflect Nigerian languages, occupations, or values (Nwosu, 2020). A career test that ignores farming, trading, or crafts will mislead students in North Central Nigeria where these are major occupations.

Sixth, traditional assessment provides insufficient data for counselling. A single grade gives little information about learning style, motivation, or career interest. Counsellors need rich, multi-source data to give effective guidance. Without it, they resort to generic advice.

Finally, traditional methods are time-consuming and inefficient. Marking thousands of scripts manually delays feedback. In the modern era where instant feedback is possible, this delay is unacceptable (Idowu & Oyekanmi, 2022). Given these limitations, it is clear that traditional testing alone cannot support effective guidance. Schools must complement it with

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continuous, competency-based, and technology-driven assessment methods that provide richer data for counselling.

Feedback as A Counselling Tool: Timely, Specific and Action-Oriented

The effectiveness of guidance and counselling in the modern era depends largely on how students are assessed and the kind of feedback they receive. This section examines the shift from traditional testing to competency-based assessment, highlights the limitations of old methods, and discusses feedback as a vital counselling tool for promoting self-awareness and career decision-making.

Types and Functions of Feedback in Guidance

i. Academic Feedback: This addresses performance in school subjects. It tells the student what was done well and what needs improvement. Example: "Your essay structure is good but work on grammar."

ii. Feedback is information provided to a learner about his performance, behavior, or progress. In guidance and counselling, feedback transforms raw assessment data into meaning. It is the bridge between testing and action. Without feedback, assessment has no impact on the student. There are several types of feedback used in guidance:

iii. Psychological Feedback: This is based on results from personality, aptitude, and intelligence tests. The counsellor explains what the scores mean for the student's behaviour and learning style (Akinade, 2019).

iv. Career Feedback: This follows career assessments. It helps students link their interests and abilities to occupations. This is vital in reducing career confusion among youths (Super, 1990).

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v. Behavioral/Social Feedback: This focuses on conduct, relationships, and emotional adjustment. It helps students develop interpersonal skills needed for school and work.

vi. Positive and Corrective Feedback: Positive feedback reinforces strengths. Corrective feedback addresses weaknesses constructively. Both are necessary for balanced development (Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

The Functions of Feedback in Guidance are Critical:

First, feedback promotes self-awareness. Many students do not know their true strengths. Feedback from tests and observations helps them to see themselves objectively. Self-knowledge is the first step in career planning. Second, feedback enhances motivation and learning. When feedback is specific, students know exactly what to do. Vague comments do not help. Research shows that immediate feedback improves academic performance and self-regulation (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Third, feedback supports career decision-making. Through feedback from interest and aptitude tests, students can identify suitable careers. This reduces the problem of graduates working outside their field (Nwosu, 2020). Fourth, feedback strengthens the counsellor-client relationship. When given with empathy, feedback builds trust. Students are more likely to share personal problems when they feel the counsellor is genuinely helping them. Fifth, feedback enables early intervention. If assessment data shows a student is struggling, immediate feedback allows the counsellor to intervene before the problem escalates (Idowu & Oyekanmi, 2022). For feedback to work in guidance, it must be timely, specific, and action-oriented. Timely means given soon after assessment. Specific means it addresses particular behaviours. Action-oriented means it suggests clear next steps. With ICT, feedback can now be instant. Online platforms can give students immediate results and suggestions. This is especially useful in schools with large

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student populations in North Central Nigeria. In conclusion, feedback is not an afterthought in guidance. It is a central tool. When done well, it empowers students to take charge of their learning and career. Schools must therefore train counsellors in effective feedback delivery.

Assessment, Measurement and Career Decision-Making

Career decision-making is one of the most important tasks students face during their school years. A good career choice leads to job satisfaction, productivity, and personal fulfillment. A poor choice leads to frustration, unemployment, and wasted potential. The quality of a student's career decision depends largely on the quality of assessment and measurement used during the guidance process. Assessment provides information about a student's abilities, interests, values, and personality. Measurement makes this information precise and comparable through the use of standardized tools. When these two are combined, they give both the student and the counsellor a clear picture of "who the student is" and "what the student can do" (Akinade, 2019). This is the foundation of sound career decision-making.

In modern practice, career decision-making is no longer left to chance or family pressure. It is now a data-driven process. For example, when a student takes an interest inventory and an aptitude test, the results can show whether the student is better suited for investigative careers like medicine and engineering, or for social careers like teaching and counselling (Super, 1990). Without this data, students often choose careers based on peer influence or perceived prestige. Measurement tools also help to reduce career mismatch. Career mismatch occurs when a person's job does not align with his abilities and interests. This is a major cause of low productivity and job dissatisfaction in Nigeria today (Nwosu, 2020). Proper assessment and measurement can prevent this by matching students to careers early. Technology has further strengthened the link between assessment and career decision-making. Online career

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portals, digital aptitude tests, and data analytics now allow counsellors to give students instant feedback on possible career paths (Idowu & Oyekanmi, 2022). This is especially important in the modern era where new careers in ICT, agribusiness, and creative industries are emerging. However, for assessment and measurement to improve career decision-making in North Central Nigeria, schools must invest in validated instruments, train counsellors, and integrate career guidance into the school curriculum. When this is done, students will graduate with clarity about their future.

Strategies for Effective Assessment, Feedback and Measurement

To rethink assessment and feedback for effective guidance and counselling, deliberate strategies must be adopted by schools, government, and counselling professionals. The following strategies are recommended:

i. Adoption of Competency-Based Assessment: Schools should move beyond paper-and-pencil tests to include projects, portfolios, presentations, and practical tasks. This will measure skills that are relevant to the world of work (Baker, 2021).
ii. Use of Validated and Culturally Relevant Measurement Tools: Interest inventories, aptitude tests, and personality scales should be adapted or developed for the Nigerian context. This will ensure that the data collected is valid and useful for counselling (Akinade, 2019).
iii. Training and Retraining of Guidance Counsellors: Counsellors must be trained in modern assessment techniques, psychological testing, and the use of ICT tools. Regular workshops and seminars should be organised by the government and professional bodies.

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iv. Integration of ICT and Data Analytics: Schools should adopt digital platforms for assessment and feedback. Computer-based testing and learning analytics can provide instant reports that help counsellors to intervene early (Idowu & Oyekanmi, 2022).

v. Timely and Specific Feedback Mechanism: Feedback should be given immediately after assessment and should be clear, descriptive, and action-oriented. Generic comments on report cards should be replaced with personalised guidance (Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

vi. Collaboration Between Schools, Parents and Industry: Career guidance should not be left to schools alone. Parents and industry partners should be involved in career talks, mentorship, and internship programs to expose students to real-world careers.

vii. Adequate Funding of Guidance and Counselling Units: Government and school administrators must provide funds for testing materials, ICT facilities, and staffing of counselling units. Without resources, no strategy can succeed. Implementing these strategies, schools in North Central Nigeria can transform their guidance and counselling services to meet modern demands.

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Conclusion

In conclusion, the world of work and education has changed, and guidance and counselling must change with it. Traditional testing and generic feedback are no longer sufficient to prepare students for the challenges of the 21st century. Modern assessment and measurement provide richer data, while timely and specific feedback empowers students to make informed career decisions. For North Central Nigeria to benefit from these modern practices, there must be a commitment from government, schools, and counselling professionals to adopt competency-based assessment, invest in technology, and train counsellors. When assessment and feedback are done right, students will be better positioned to discover their potential and contribute meaningfully to national development. **Recommendations**

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

i. Government should fund and equip guidance and counselling units in all schools with modern assessment tools and ICT facilities.
ii. School Administrators should employ qualified counsellors and reduce the student-to-counsellor ratio to allow for individualised assessment and feedback.
iii. Counsellors should adopt competency-based and continuous assessment methods instead of relying only on examinations.
iv. Ministries of Education should organise regular training for counsellors on modern measurement tools and digital feedback platforms.
v. Test Developers should validate and adapt psychological instruments to reflect Nigerian culture and occupational structure.
vi. Parents and Stakeholders should support career guidance programs and avoid imposing career choices on students.

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