REINVENTING ISLAMIC GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING ADAPTABILITY TO ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This position paper critically examines the state of Islamic guidance and counselling for adolescents in Nigeria, mapping current practices, identifying enduring gaps, and offering evidence-based, culturally resonant adaptations. The study to support the evolution of a responsive, holistic, and ethically grounded counselling paradigm. Specifically, the paper analyzed the basic principles of Islamic guidance and counselling, empirical outcomes from Nigerian Islamic schools, counselling initiatives, and adolescent mental health studies, as well as cross-case comparisons of integrative frameworks blending Islamic and mainstream psychology, gaps and limitations inherent in the existing Islamic counselling approaches and procedures for implementing effective integration and adaptability. The study adopted the integrative, multidisciplinary literature review method and the results showed that the integration of Islamic counselling with psycho-spiritual principles significantly reduces depression, anxiety and other behavioural problems. The study concluded that Islamic guidance and counselling in Nigeria must evolve into professionally and evidence-based one rather than authority-driven and prescriptive model.

Keywords: islamic guidance and counselling, faith-based, education curriculum, integration, adaptability, adolescents

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is commonly described as a very religious nation. In fact, research suggests that the reality of today's life in Nigeria or life in general, is that there is no escape from religion and there is no doubt about its relevance (Oloyede, 2015). The author opines that everyone passes through it at one stage or another in life, at birth, marriage and /or at death. In reference, to the Interactive data table by World Muslim population by country, Oloyede reported the Muslim population estimate in Nigeria to be about 50.4% of her total population, underlying the need to incorporate this faith-based care framework in the life of such huge proportion of the population. The roots of structured guidance and counselling in Nigeria are neither exclusively Western nor recent. Omoniyi (2016) emphasizes that Nigeria's counselling services were shaped by social, educational, and ideological pressures post-independence, and that the services are not merely imported Western models. Traditional forms of counselling, basically rooted in Islamic, Christian, and indigenous beliefs, have been embedded in the precolonial family, community, and faith-based structures long before the formalization of guidance services in 1959 at St. Theresa's College, Oke Ado Ibadan, by a group of dedicated reverend sisters (Fareo, 2020).

For Muslims, the institutionalization of guidance began to take distinctive shape in the mid-20th century. Notably, the founding of the Muslim Students' Society of Nigeria (MSSN) in 1954 (Zubair, 2023) marked a revolution in faith-based youth development, advocacy, and the provision of holistic support to Muslim adolescents. These occurred just before the incorporation of Guidance and Counselling into the national educational curriculum from the 1960s–1980s (with policy support in 1981) which enabled schools, including those in Muslim-majority areas, to establish formal guidance units. However, the integration process has seen fluctuations in quality, recognition, and adaptability. Challenges include role ambiguity for counsellors, lack of standardization, resource gaps, and tensions between imported "Western" counselling paradigms and Islamic cultural realities. Specifically, Islamic guidance and counselling in Nigeria is rooted in the traditional Qur'anic education systems (Tsangaya/Ile Kewu), the Malam-Almajiri framework, madrasas, mosque-based faith-based care, and informal family or community practice. In traditional Muslim communal life, these systems once formed the backbone of lived experiences of Muslims comprising teaching the Quran, Hadith, fiqh, and basic Arabic literacy, while inculcating foundational values (akhlaq, discipline, respect) that undergird moral formation.

However, starting from the 20th century, colonial disruptions, socio-political instability, and the perceived obsolescence of traditional methods led to waning confidence in such structures, particularly as the Almajiri system in the north became synonymous with economic deprivation and social exclusion. In the late 20th century, formal Islamic schools began to emerge along with some government-backed integrative models, particularly in Northern Nigeria, combining Western subjects with structured Islamic studies. These fostered broader literacy and economic mobility and provided more equitable access particularly increasing girls' participation. However, criticisms persist regarding their ability to address deeper psychosocial needs or to produce graduates with advanced religious or life skills. University Muslim Student Societies (MSSN), da'awah organizations, and NGOs now also play major roles in urban areas, while institutions such as Al-Hikmah University and specialized training centres offer professionalization routes for Islamic education and counselling.

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It should be noted that, in Nigeria, Islamic guidance and counselling encompass preventive, developmental, remedial, and crisis intervention activities. This takes the form of individual pastoral counselling, group halaqah sessions, school-based guidance counsellors, faith clinics, youth mentorship programs, family and marriage counsel, digital outreach (websites, WhatsApp groups, e-counselling platforms like Seek "A" Counsel), and advocacy through organizations such as the Islamic Counselling Initiatives of Nigeria (ICIN). The adolescent phase in Nigeria, as elsewhere, is fraught with developmental risks and opportunities. For instance, at this stage, hormonal streams triggering intense emotional volatility in form of joy, exuberance, sadness, anger, anxiety, and frequent mood swings are prevalent. Nigerian adolescents tend to experience low self-esteem, social comparison, and heightened sensitivity to peer judgment. They feel unsupported when family ties weaken, leading to risky behaviors (substance abuse, truancy, risky sexual activity). They sometimes exhibit both positive emotions (hope, ambition, religious fervor) and negative emotions (anger, loneliness, rebellion), often in exaggerated forms.

Also at this stage, peer group affiliation is central to identity exploration and risk management. With healthy peer relationships, positive developments like foster leadership, teamwork, and positive goal setting prevail, while negative influences can escalate into delinquency, at this stage, especially under digital peer pressure. In fact, social media amplifies risks include cyberbullying, exposure to harmful content, sexting, and reinforcement of risky or anti-social behaviors. Nigerian youths now typify fluid, hybrid identities, drawn from both tradition and global culture, as online interactions have been found to strongly empower self-expression among but this may also destabilize religious and ethnic identities, sometimes resulting in cyber-based peer victimization, anxiety, and moral confusion.

In the Western models of adolescent development, emphases are laid on identity, autonomy, socialization, and abstract reasoning, according to Erikson's stages, Piaget's cognitive stages, and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theories. In the same vein, Islamic perspectives align with and broaden, these models by recognizing adolescence as the onset of "mukallaf" status, that is full religious and ethical accountability with the advent of puberty. It opines that adolescence is marked not only by biological and psychological transitions but by spiritual and moral preparation for adult responsibility. It also posits that all educational efforts (tarbiyyah) are front loaded, with early training in prayer, fasting, and moral reasoning, based on the Prophetic model of cultivating competence, emotional maturity, and internalization of values (Saafir and Umarji, 2024). It also sees the phase as the phase of "struggle with the self" (jihad al-nafs), requiring individualized guidance, firm yet compassionate boundaries, and community support. Psychologically, Islamic teachings encourage resilience, gratitude (shukr), patience (sabr), trust in God (tawakkul), and regular spiritual practices (salat, dhikr) as means to regulate emotions, build self-efficacy, and find meaning during adolescent turbulence.

It is however important to note that in Nigeria, religiosity is a powerful predictor of identity formation, in which adolescents who actively engaged in church or mosque life report stronger personal and moral identity, better self-regulation, and lower rates of risk behaviours. Locus of control, value clarification, and spiritual mentorship are crucial for positive identity development. Islam provides existential meaning and a coherent worldview for Muslim youth—a sense of being part of a cosmic purpose, with divinely mandated responsibilities of Ibadah and vicegerency (khilafah) and a moral code that guides

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daily interactions. Family, mosque communities, and faith-based organizations reinforce this orientation, offering both spiritual and social support networks.

However, increasing exposure to secular ideologies and globalized value systems can lead to identity dissonance. Tensions arise between the religiously anchored "nafs" (soul/self in Islamic psychology) and external pressures, with outcomes contingent on the adolescent's capacity for reflection (tazkiyah al-nafs), parental engagement, and the community's ability to model supportive, compassionate faith practices. In Nigeria, the interplay of ethnic traditions (Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, and minority cultures), extended family ties, gender roles, and communalism shapes adolescent behaviour and identity. All these and other values like respect for elders, collective decision-making, and the expectation of conformity can support resilience but can also trigger conflicts for youth exploring autonomy or coping with intergenerational value gaps.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Although, Nigeria can be described as a very religious nation, with about half of its population identifying as Muslims, Islamic guidance and counselling is yet to evolve to address adolescents' relaities and challenges, especially in the 21st century. Historially, the emergence of islamic guiance and counselling came through Qur'anic schools, mosque-based mentoring, and faith-based student organizations, providing moral and spiritual orientation. These models have however been disrupted by colonial influence, modernization, thereby leaving traditional systems, including the current Islamic guidance and counselling obsolete and unable to meet the psychosocial needs of adolescents in the modern world. Whereas, adolescents in Nigeria continue to face complex challenges, including but not limited to emotional challenges, risky behaviours, identity and esteem struggles, mental health concerns. While modern approaches to counselling seems to have resources in addressing these challenges, Islamic perspective could be said to largely lack the models and approaches to address these as focus still remains mainly authority-centered and didactic. This gap left many Muslim adolescents vulnerable to low self-esteem, identity crisis among others. Thus, the concerns on re-inventing Islamic guidance and counselling remains. Hence this study.

METHOD

This study employs an integrative, multidisciplinary literature review approach, synthesizing empirical studies, policy reports, and theoretical orientations. Key focal points include basic principles of Islamic guidance and counselling, empirical outcomes from Nigerian Islamic schools, counselling initiatives, and adolescent mental health studies. cross-case comparisons of integrative frameworks blending Islamic and mainstream psychology, gaps and limitations inherent in the existing Islamic counselling approaches and procedures for implementing effective integration and adaptability of Islamic guidance and counselling

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The paper analyzed the basic principles of Islamic guidance and counselling. Islamic counselling is more than religious advice. It is a therapeutic alliance that integrates empathy, trust, positive regard, congruence, and unconditional acceptance (core Rogersian principles) with explicit psycho-spiritual

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strategies of ibadah (motivational faith), amanah (self-concept as divine stewardship), ilm (intellectual growth), and consultation (shura). Culturally adapted Islamic counselling models emphasize individualized assessment, recognizing unique temperament, family background, and life context. It also emphasize the integration of Qur'anic guidance, Prophetic role models, and communal resources as well as spiritual practices, such as recitation, supplication, recourse to dhikr, as therapeutic tools. It is culturally responsive communication, with sensitivity to context, and support for the development of healthy self-esteem and identity. These principles align with Rogers' Person-Centered Theory, which argues that empathy, congruence, and unconditional positive regard create the therapeutic climate for growth. Islamic counselling, however, expands this model by embedding spiritual practices such as *ibadah* and *shura* as culturally rooted therapeutic tools.

The study presents empirical evidence that supports efficacy of Islamic counselling. For instance, in a randomized controlled trials reported by Saleh, Usman & Abbas (2022) indicated that rational emotive behaviour therapy (REBT) and cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT), when delivered in Nigerian Islamic settings and contextualized with Qur'anic content, significantly reduce anxiety, depression, and behavioural problems among adolescents. Findings from Saleh, Usman & Abbas (2022) support the Cognitive-Behavioral Theory, which emphasizes restructuring maladaptive beliefs. When Qur'anic verses are used in CBT or REBT frameworks, the cultural and spiritual relevance enhances acceptance among Muslim adolescents, reinforcing Erikson's notion of identity formation during adolescence. A similar result was reported in Moses and Ahmad (2024). Also, Islamic guidance and counselling enhance self-esteem, self-concept, and resilience, particularly for vulnerable adolescent subgroups including orphans, girls, and rural youth. This can be found, supported by many other studies, for instance, Wil & Othman (2021) found that Islamic counselling, grounded in Qur'anic principles and prophetic traditions, fosters faith, confidence, and moral clarity, which directly enhance self-esteem and resilience. Also, Akib et al (2025) found that Islamic psychotherapy improves mental health and spiritual well-being by reinforcing aqidah (belief), worship, and morality. These elements are linked to stronger self-concept and emotional resilience, especially in adolescents facing identity challenges.

Gaps and limitations inherent in the existing Islamic counselling approaches were also explored. Traditional Islamic counselling in Nigeria remains heavily instructional or didactic, focusing on Qur'anic memorization, prescriptive moral guidance, and punitive measures for deviant behaviour. These approaches often fail to address the individual's unique psychological needs, family environment, or social determinants of distress. Another important gap is insufficient professionalization and training received by the only few available Islamic counsellors particularly in the areas of psychology, adolescent development, or evidence-based counselling techniques. This creates a significant mismatch between the empirical needs of adolescents (who may present with anxiety, depression, trauma, or substance use concerns) and the competencies of most Mallams, Imams, or Islamic school teachers. The dominance of instructional and punitive methods reflects a reliance on behaviorist conditioning, focusing on external reinforcement rather than addressing underlying cognitive and emotional processes. This partly explains the mismatch between adolescents' psychosocial needs and existing counselling practices.

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A very important aspect in the gaps and limitations prevailing in the currently existing Islamic counselling approaches comprised the associated stigma, culture of silence, and gender sensitivity. There is general cultural reluctance to discuss mental health openly, particularly for girls. Myths linking psychological distress to "weak faith," demonic influence, or moral failure persist, deterring help-seeking and perpetuating harmful exclusion or even abuse (especially for "Almajirai" or street children). Others include the fact that only few mosques, Islamic schools, or community centres dedicate spaces for youth-friendly counselling services and where such exists, the religious counsellors lack the capacity or confidence to navigate digital platforms or to address youth concerns like cyberbullying, addiction, or digital identity issues.

Procedures for Implementing Effective Integration and Adaptability of Islamic Guidance and Counselling

Just like any programme hoping to be successfully implemented, a context-specific assessment needs to be conducted in the schools, state, region and the entire country to understand adolescent profiles, risk factors, and available resources, using both Western and Islamic psychological screening tools. This should be followed by developing a continuous professional development programs for counsellors focusing on Islamic counselling principles (Qur'anic, prophetic, legal, and ethical), modern adolescent psychology, cultural competence and digital literacy. Islamic Studies and guidance and counselling curricula need to be redesigned to reflect real-world adolescent issues (e.g., substance use, digital safety, resilience, mental health). Designers should collaborate with faith and lay educators to create relatable content and teaching strategies. Implementation should incorporate hybrid counselling systems in forms of face-to-face, phone, WhatsApp, and secure counselling portals. These should ensure privacy and adopt measures against cyber-related risks. Religious leaders, parents, traditional authorities, and alumni should be incorporated into the programme delivery, monitoring, and sustainability (e.g., via interfaith alliances or community peace partnerships. Timely program impact should be carried out using validated psychometric and spiritual well-being measures, to track and adjust strategies based on feedback and research evidence

CONCLUSION

This paper was targeted at exploring the fact that it is not whether Islamic guidance can adapt to adolescent developmental needs in Nigeria, but that it actually must. However, how quickly and intentionally institutions, practitioners, and communities can rethink, invest, and collaborate to make this adaptation a lived reality for all Nigerian youth is the prevailing concern. If and when this is achieved, the re-invention will enable Nigerian Muslim adolescents to flourish, not just as passive inheritors of tradition, but as active agents of faith, reason, and compassionate social transformation.

The path forward for Islamic guidance and counselling in Nigeria requires an integrated, developmental, and culturally grounded revamp, with imperatives to move from prescriptive, authority-centric models to individualized, evidence-informed, and collaborative practice. It should also adopt Eriksonian developmental insights within a robust Islamic psychological framework that harmonizes body, soul, intellect, and emotion. Systematically professionalizing the field with standards of practice, multi-

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sectoral partnerships, and digital innovation will also help to empowering youth, families, and communities as co-constructors of moral, spiritual, and psychological resilience.

Recommendations

School-based mental health and guidance programs integrating Islamic guidance and counselling alongside secular counselling in primary and secondary schools should be introduced and/or invigorated, providing dedicated staff training, resources, and institutional backing. Community and faith-based partnerships should be encouraged particularly with regards to funding and technical support for faith-driven NGOs and mosque counselling teams, with a focus on areas affected by violence, displacement, or poverty.

These should also include research and data systems incorporating robust evaluation and monitoring, with incentives for longitudinal and implementation research on culturally adapted Islamic guidance practices in Nigerian adolescent populations. Islamic counselling certification and accreditation should be recognized by law which should also ensure rights, privacy, and protection of minors from harm or exploitation within both religious and secular counselling frameworks in Alignment with the Child Rights Act, Gender Equality, and Disability Law. All these should be incorporated into training and operations of Islamic guidance services.

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