COUNSELLORS' COMPETENCE AS INDICES FOR COUNSELLEES ATTRACTION IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN ANAMBRA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examined the Counsellors' competence-attributes on counsellees attraction in Public Secondary Schools in Anambra State. One research questions and one null hypothesis guided the study. The study adopted descriptive survey research design. The population of the study was all public senior secondary schools in Anambra state. The sample comprised 650 senior secondary students (338 males and 312 females) selected through simple random sampling method. The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire developed by the researcher titled "Counsellors Competence as Indices for Counsellees Attraction (CCICA).The reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach Alpha estimate and it yielded a co-efficient of 0.78. Mean and standard deviation scores were used to answer the research questions while t-test statistics was used to test the hypothesis at 0.05 alpha levels. The findings of the study revealed that Guidance counsellors competence is an effective indices that attracts counsellees in public secondary schools in Anambra state. Based on the above finding, it recommended that universities, colleges of Education and other institutions of higher learning where guidance and counselling courses are taught should emphasize the importance of counsellors undergoing training that will make them more effective (competent) in discharging their duties as professional counsellors as well as need for one to have proper training that rooted in psychology which would enabled them to function optimally and effectively as professional counsellors.

Key words: Counselling, Counsellors, Competence-attributes, Counsellees and Attraction

Introduction

The practice of school counselling traverses the bounds of pedestrian guidance and counselling in a conventional academic setting. As a profession, it involves accurate articulation of skills channeled towards facilitating proper growth and development of students by employing the most realistic approaches. Hence, the school counselling structure is traditionally a purveyor of selected guidance programmes like appraisals, placements, orientations, counselling, information, referrals and follow-up services. Counselling is important in the school system and its need for utmost professionalism in the day-to-day management of school guidance programmes. The position of a counsellor in the school system is essential and there is need therefore for the professional counsellor to harness his/her competence in providing solutions to students' academic, vocational and personal-social problems. Therefore, counsellors must have their clients' interests at heart and be able to brace up with their individual differences.

Ifelunni in Umezurlike and Eneasator (2010) defined Counsellor as a trained expert with enough psychology necessary to understand and foretell human nature. In addition to his psychological groundedness, a counsellor is a trained personnel in test construction and administration. He possesses demonstrable theories needed to understand clients' problems and be in a position to offer assistance. The counsellor is expected to have some qualities with which he can be identified. These qualities differentiate him from people in other professions. The counsellor's characteristics are marks with which he can be identified. Uzoechi cited in Umezulike and Eneasator,(2010) outlined the characteristics of a counsellor in the following order: the guidance counsellor is emphatic, counsellor is emotionally stable, counsellor accepts all individuals as clients, counsellor is Utmost confidential, counsellor is human oriented, counsellor is a genuine person, and counsellor is non-judgmental.

According to Olayinka in Egbo (2009), the school guidance counsellor must be cheerful, humorous, highly intelligent, diligent, humble, helpful, intellectually sound and resourceful. He must have a warm personality and be ready to establish a

level of rapport that can last an entire counselling session with the client. Omebe in Egbo(2009) observed that counsellors must be able to establish congruence, understanding, empathy and unconditional positive regard. When the need arises, they must be able to give counselling without apathy, irrespective of age, colour, size, sex or place of origin. The American Professional Guidance Association (APGA) in Egbo (2009) outlined the six basic qualities guidance counsellors must possess: a belief in each person as an individual, a commitment to individual human values, alertness to the world, open mindedness, self –understanding and professional commitment.

These qualities mark out enviable school counsellors and are key elements in defining their relationship with students' clientele. It is widely accepted by practitioners and theorists that the relationship between counsellors and clients is an important aspect of counselling (Anigbogu 2002). Egbo (2009) stressed that ideal counsellors should exhibit competence to the counselee. This means that professional counsellors should be enthusiastic and performance-driven. Effective counsellors are those who can establish caring and non-threatening relationships with their clients. They must build a confident atmosphere in which both feel safe and secure enough to interact as real spontaneous people. The quality of this relationship can in itself be as therapeutic as it can be largely dependent on the counsellor being a real person with courage, self-confidence, amiability, resourcefulness and an appealing natural appearance that commands trust (Guilford in Okeke, 2017).

Mkpa in Okeke (2017) observed that the professional counsellor is an expert in his area of specialization. He has cultivated the skills of helping people understand their situations, clarify their values and make informed decisions for which they assume responsibilities. The counsellor may be regarded as an educator who aims at creating, through the exercise of his skills, an environment in which the student can face and explore his/her own feeling without fear. In this same environment, the student can equally learn how to cope more effectively with decision-making; examine values and objectives without the risk of condemnation. He must have

received training as a counsellor and must possess certain skills and expertise that enable him to be effective. Guilford in Okeke (2017) emphasized that it is important for individuals to create favorable appearance and modesty in every aspect of people's personality. This, according to him, can promote social interaction and cohesion. It also endears clients to professional counsellors as personality assessment is important in disclosure of problems. The professional counsellor's personal qualities are important in counselling sessions. Impactful competence concerns both male and female counsellors. Animba in Egbo (2009) affirmed that a counsellor has to develop his own life experience knowing that experience cannot be bought or taught. The counsellor needs to know about himself, about changing values, current laws and policies, the world of work, world of education, the people's culture, society, and environment among other things to build himself, his knowledge, personality and competence to be a functional counsellor. A good and effective counsellor must have confidence. Every profession requires the professionals to behave in particular ways in order to carry out their duties effectively. As such, the counselling profession can only be practiced effectively if counsellors exhibit certain behaviors in the discharge of their duties (Odocited in Nduka-ozo 2011). Guilford in Okeke (2017) identified the following ten point behaviours as some of the important attributes of school guidance counsellors: regularity to school, devotion to duty, friendliness and ability to accommodate, empathic understanding, moral uprightness, readiness to learn, adaptability, dynamisms, confidentiality, and responsible appearances.

Competence in counselling is an important component of guidance and counselling training (Wannan & McCarthy 2005).In addition, counsellors competence involves marshalling knowledge, skills and attitudes to meet complex demands. The guidance counsellor should possess and demonstrate competence in the following four areas: knowledge, the counselling relationship, counselling skills, professional/ethical attitudes and practice (National center for guidance education, 2011). Experts in counselling have always insisted on competence in counselling sessions. Ofojebe in Egbo (2009) agreed that counsellor' lack of requisite skills,

competence, experience and knowledge, obviously run counter to the overall objectives of the guidance and counselling oriented new educational system. Wheeler in Okeke (2017) believed that counsellors must present themselves to clients in such a way that they inspire confidence from the clients and that they have the potential to be helpful.

He observed that professionalism in counselling covers diverse aspects of counsellors' practices, ranging from the ability to communicate with mental or other health professionals, to keeping accurate accounts and adherence to codes of ethics. It also includes a commitment to continued professional conduct and competence. A critical awareness of personal limitations is essential to ensure that clients are referred to other agencies when appropriate. No doubt, self awareness is essential for the counsellor but he must be able to focus attention on his clients. Ifelunni in Umezulike and Eneasator (2010) wholesomely agreed with the above but added that inherent in the ability of the counsellor is a mature interest and concern for others. The school guidance programme does not and cannot function in a vacuum. It functions in terms of a given time and place. In the same vein, a counsellor does not counsel in the abstract, he or she functions in situations (Ipaye in Umezulike & Eneasator,2010).The school counsellor therefore in organizing and executing any guidance programme must: pay attention to local variations in culture, relate specific objectives to local nuances and be familiar with the socio-psychological environment of the locality's beliefs systems, the religious atmosphere, the pattern of child rearing, child labour and its format, and the strata of certain cultural factors since all these distinguish one's society or community from another (Animba,1988).From discussions above, it is evident that expertise is necessary in handling human problems, human relationships, educational and occupational orientations, and aspirations among students. The problem however is to therefore, examine counsellors competence in counselling as indices for counsellees attraction.

Statement of the Problem

The truth is that in most cases, the counselling programme is a copious reflection of the counsellors that headed the programme. This boils down to the fact that competence of the counsellor is necessary in contemporary counselling sessions.

Without this balance, students-oriented concerns such as educational, personal-social or vocational problems may have not been properly addressed. This may be as a result of lack of attraction of the counsellor. Lack of attraction may be due to competence of the counsellor. Beyond that, some of them appear too harsh, undisciplined and indeed lack the candor be called counsellors. A good number of the counsellors are both unethical and unprofessional in their practice, such that students begin to query the kind of training given to them. Hence, all these border on competence.

Where the counsellor lacks competence and good personal dispositions, it becomes the case of a well-distilled bottle of water that tastes like ginger with this, the taste first and attraction will disappear. A situation where students identify a particular counsellor as a drunk, smoker, gossip, dirty and unkempt, the good personality and attraction to the counsellor and even the competence badly threatened. Students may lose confidence in such a counsellor and may prefer to go home with their problems and discuss with non-counsellors/teachers who they presume would be more competent to address their counselling needs. The problem of this study therefore was centered on examining counsellor's competence-attributes that attracts counsellees as perceived by students.

Purpose of the Study

The major purpose of this study was to examine the following objective:

1. The counsellors' competence-attributes to male and female counsellees' attraction.

Research Questions

The following research question guided the study:

1. What are counsellors' competence-attributes that attract male and femalecounselees

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

Ho_1. There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female counselee's on the counsellors' competence-attributes for counselee's attraction.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey design aimed at examining the counsellor's competence attributes that engenders counsellees attraction in public secondary schools in Anambra State. The population of the study comprised all the Public Senior Secondary School students in Anambra State. There are 254 Public Secondary Schools in Anambra State with a total population of 45,499 (21,067 male students and 24,432 female students) (Source: 2018/2019 statistics of Anambra State Post Primary School Service Commission). There are 32 boys Secondary schools, 43 girls Secondary Schools and 179 co-education schools. The sample of the study comprises of 650 Public Senior Secondary School Students (338 male students and 312 female students. Simple random sampling by balloting with replacement was employed. 2 schoolswere sampled each from the Local Government Areas making a total of 26 schools that were used for the study. The researcher used non-proportionate sampling technique to draw 25 students (13 males and 12 females) each from the 26 sampled schools making a total of 650 students as sample for the study. Instrument for data collection of this study was the structured questionnaire comprising forty items and was titled "Counselors' Competence as Indices for Counselees Attraction (CCICA)".The instrument had a reliability co-efficient of 0.78, which was considered high and internally consistent for use in this study. Mean and standard deviation scores were used to answer the research questions, while t-test statistics was used to test the hypothesis at 0.05 alpha levels. Results are presented in tables in line with the research questions and hypothesis that guided the study.

Research Question 1

What are the counsellors' competence-attributes that attract male and female counsellees?

Table 1: Mean ratings of male and female counsellees on the counsellor's competence-attributes that attract them. The competence-attributes are:

	Male			**Female**		
Items	**X**	**SD**	**Decision**	**X**	**SD**	**Decision**
Geniuness with interacting with clients	3.42	0.87	Accepted	3.43	0.86	**Accepted**
Not strict in resolving academic problems	3.37	0.08	Accepted	3.37	0.80	Accepted

Not strict in resolving vocational problems	3.31	0.79	Accepted	3.30	0.80	Accepted
Not strict in resolving social problems	3.42	0.75	Accepted	3.43	0.75	Accepted
Strict in resolving personal problems	3.46	0.79	Accepted	3.47	0.78	Accepted
Attending during counselling sessions	3.41	0.93	Accepted	3.43	0.91	Accepted
Relating cordially in counseling sessions	3.45	0.90	Accepted	3.47	0.89	Accepted
Not being judgmental	3.26	0.93	Accepted	3.25	0.93	Accepted
Show of empathy at all times	3.46	0.83	Accepted	3.78	0.47	Accepted
Consideration of emotional feelings when need be	3.19	0.97	Accepted	3.17	0.98	Accepted
Ability to establish rapport	3.56	0.77	Accepted	3.55	0.77	Accepted
Being concrete	2.95	1.09	Accepted	2.95	1.09	Accepted
Permitting use of catharsis to emit bad feelings	2.94	1.04	Accepted	2.94	1.04	Accepted
Proper use of counselling theories in solving problems	3.39	0.83	Accepted	3.37	0.84	Accepted
Ability to show unconditional positive regards	3.65	0.66	Accepted	3.68	0.63	Accepted
Good use of group counselling procedure to generate oneness/unity among counsellees.	3.46	0.82	Accepted	3.47	0.83	Accepted
Ability to define a realistic time framework	2.94	1.04	Accepted	2.86	1.04	Accepted
Proper application of counselling techniques	2.82	1.08	Accepted	2.83	1.09	Accepted
Being confrontational in judgment	2.78	1.09	Accepted	2.76	1.09	Accepted
Respect for confidentiality	3.39	0.89	Accepted	3.40	0.88	Accepted
Grand Mean	**3.28**		**Accepted**	**3.30**		**Accepted**

Result in Table 1 above revealed that a good majority of the respondents (male and female) agreed that most counsellors possess the counsellor's competence –attributes that attract counsellees. Among these items are 5 ,9,11,15 and 16 with mean scores of 3.46,3.56,3.65 and 3.48 respectively are perceived as the ,most displayed attributes by both male and female counsellees.

Table 2: t-test summary of the mean ratings of male and female counsellees on the counsellor's competence attributes for counsellees attraction

Gender	N	Mean	S.D	t.cal.	df	t.crit.	Decision
Male	338	3.27	0.85				
				0.59	648	1.96	Not Significant
Female	312	3.23	0.88				

P<0.5, df =684

Result in Table 2 revealed that calculated t-value of 0.59 was lower than the critical t-value of 1.96, therefore the null hypothesis which states that there was no significant difference in the perception of both male and female counsellees on counsellors 'competence –attributes for attraction was not rejected.

Discussion of Findings

The outcome of the analysis on Table 3 revealed that students accepted all the items such as genuineness while interacting with clients. They disapproved of strictness in resolving academic problems, strictness in resolving vocational

problems, strictness in resolving social problems, strictness in resolving personal problems, attentiveness during counselling sessions, respect for confidentiality and among others.

It is also in line with Okafor and Ugwuegbulam cited in Egbo (2009), Umezulike and Eneasator (2010) they agreed that competence attributes are certain innate characteristics expected of a professional (competent) counsellor. If he is to render his services effectively, he must be empathetic, patient, attending and listening in his dealings with his clients. From the finding, it can be seen that the counsellor needs to have charisma, warmth, patience, and friendliness attributes to maintain a good working relationship with clients. The finding of the study with a grand total mean of 3.28 is not unexpected because the issue of competency is a very important attribute. It has to do with certain basic skills, abilities knowledge, attitudes acquired through experience or training which counsellors must have to make good counsellors.

With these competencies above, it is pertinent to mention that the counsellor should be able to maintain confidentiality of all information revealed either by the client during counselling or through data collection process. All these would make the client to have trust in the counsellor and be ready to corporate with him/her in the counselling session. With these, the problems of the client will be easy to solve.

The result of analysis on Table 4 revealed that students agreed on all the items as the competencies needed by counsellors to be attracted to the female counsellees. Most notably, the students strongly agreed that ability to establish rapport, being concrete, permitting use of catharsis to emit bad feelings.

Also, they agreed with proper use of counselling theories in solving problems, ability to show unconditional positive regards, good use of group counselling procedures to generate unity among clients, ability to define a realistic framework.

Proper application of counselling techniques, being confrontational in judgment and respect for confidentiality among others with grand mean of 3.29 are the main competency attributes of the counsellor. With this competence of the counsellor, the student feels at ease to express themselves in the counselling process.

The findings agreed with that of Obikezie and Umezulike (2008). These scholars suggested some of the qualities of a competent counsellor to includeability to establish rapport, faith in students' capabilities, patience, tolerance, and willingness to serve. For them, understanding of students' capabilities, aspirations, interest in educational process, ability to function at irregular time, respect for others, good physical and emotional health, open mindedness, understanding of self and professional commitments such as honesty and keeping of secrets, are also key qualities.

Also, Obikeze and Umezulike in Eneastor (2010:178) explained that "a counsellor who is to be reckoned with due to his skills, techniques and competencies, must possesses most of these qualities and invaluably reveal his abilities such as patience and understanding. .

For counsellors to be more effective, they have to establish a good relationship with clients. counsellors have to create enabling environments and good atmosphere. For instance, a counsellor can do this through putting the counsellee at ease by greeting the clients and calling them by their names. To this end, the client senses that the counsellor feels his pains and feels that the counsellor is with him/her and ready to assist him/her in solving her problems. For this reason, the clients will be ready to co-operate and explore their problems the more.

Implications for Counselling:

The findings of the study have serious implications for counselling

1. It would helps counsellors to have the requisite skills and training that will help them proffer solutions to his or his clients problems
2. Counsellors are formidable force to reckon with in finding lasting solution to students Educational, Vocational and Socio-personal issues using various counselling strategies and competences to salvage the nation from great dangers posed by lack of proper information.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions were drawn:

Guidance counsellors can contribute towards national development through effective counselling. This effective counselling can however be achieved through

counsellors' effectiveness and competence. Counsellors can achieve this through their calm approach, unconditional positive regards, genuineness, patience, rapport, empathy understanding, truthfulness, humility, acceptance, sense of humour, respect for uniqueness, worthiness, caring attitude, calmness, confidentiality and pleasantness.

Finally, all these and more would make room for an effective counsellor and counsellee relationship. It will also make the counsellees to be attracted to counsellors' competence as well as impact positive counsellors' influence on the Public Secondary School Students as well as youth which are important contributions to our national development.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion of this study, the following recommendations were made. They include:

1. Universities, Colleges of Education and other institutions of higher learning where guidance counselling courses are taught, should emphasize the importance of counsellors undergoing training that will make them more effective (competent) in discharging their duties as professional counsellors
2. The principles and practices identified by this study should form the basis for the emphasis mentioned above. The findings should be included in the methodology programmes of institutions of higher learning where counselling courses are taught.
3. The Counselling Association of Nigeria (CASSON) should during her annual conferences and seminars discuss the need for counsellors to have a proper training that rooted in psychology, which would enable them to function optimally and effectively
4. Ministries of Education should organize seminars and workshops for in-service guidance counsellors on the needs for counsellors to have a qualified certificate before one can practice as a professional counsellor in order to maintain acceptable norms that the profession is known for. In planning such programmes, the findings of this study could be used as bases.

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