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Professional Competency among School and Non-School Counsellors in Rivers State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study examined professional competency among school and non-school counsellors in Rivers State, Nigeria. The survey method was adopted. A simple random sampling technique was utilized to select one hundred and twenty (120) school and non-school counsellors for the study. The "Counsellor Competency Assessment Rating Scale" (CCARS). The scale has three (3) sections: competency in helping relationship, competency in client assessment, and competency in human growth and development was used to generate data. The t-test statistics was utilized to test the three null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that hypotheses one and three were rejected, while hypothesis two was accepted. Based on the findings some recommendations were made. (1) The government of Nigeria should encourage CASSON to start National Certification Programmes for school and Agency counsellors. (2) Colleges and Universities offering programmes in counseling should encourage certification programmes for BSc and Masters Level. (3) Core areas in counselling should be included in all Colleges and Universities curricula.

Introduction

Counsellors' knowledge, understanding and application of various foundational issues in human growth and development is central in counselling relationship. Counsellors are required to have competencies in the stages of human development, such as, types of aging, concept of nature Vs nurture, continuous Vs discontinuous development. Counsellors are expected to demonstrate competency in the areas of special designs in human development research, case study, naturalistic study, survey research, cross-sectional design studies, longitudinal design studies, as well as time-lag studies [1-3].

It is expected that counsellors be able to demonstrate competencies in understanding human development in term of physical, cognitive and psychosocial domains. Theories of cognitive development describe how individual's innact meaning from their experiences by using thought processes. Piaget [4] refuted the concept that learning was primarily biological or environmentally determined, and advanced the most influential and comprehensive approach to cognitive development. Also, to be noted in the cognitive theories areas are: Lev Vygotsky's cognitive developmental theory, cognitive dissonance by Festing [5] and theories of language development.

In the helping profession, such as counselling, there are certain developmental requirements that an effective counsellor must possess to perform his or her functions effectively. The most effective counsellor is one who has achieved a balance of interpersonal and technical competence. Therefore, competencies in the areas of human growth and development, professional orientation and ethical practice, assessment, and the helping relationships are very paramount.

Professional orientation and ethical practice include much of the counselling curriculum. Professional counsellors in schools or non-school settings must become very knowledgeable with ethical and legal practice in Nigeria and other parts of the world. Counsellors are also expected to understand the roles of professional organizations and several specialties in counselling practice.

The counselling profession in Nigeria and other countries includes counsellors who render services in various settings, from educational institutions, hospitals, and community health centers [6]. The counselling profession covers a number of distinct specializations, of which, each is concerned to addressing the special needs of a particular group of individuals. These specializations include: clinical mental health counselling, college admissions counselling, college and university counseling, rehabilitations counselling and school counselling.

In addition to the above, counsellors are expected to demonstrate competencies in the areas of assessment and helping relationship. Competency in assessment areas is very crucial for gathering and documenting information pertaining to client's knowledge, skills, attitudes, and preferences. Assessment is the art of systematic and scientific process of gathering and documenting vital data for analysis and interpretations. Evaluative procedures used in counselling includes: clinical interviewing, informal assessment, personality assessment, and ability assessment [1].

The helping relationships area covers the key concepts, theories, skills, and interventions that make up the essentials of the counselling profession. Counsellors are expected to demonstrate competencies in the areas of: Counselling goals setting, orientation to wellness and prevention, counsellor characteristics and behaviours, essential interviewing and counselling skills, counselling theories, understanding family and other systems, and crises interventions and suicide prevention models [7].

Statement of the Problem

Competency is a household word in the written text and spoken words of people on the streets and professionals in various field of human endeavour. Society often talked about the police competence in protecting live and property. The classroom teachers are expected to demonstrate minimal competency to teach the learners. Medical practitioners are equally expected by patients to demonstrate competency in their service delivery in the hospitals and other related settings. Even professional drivers, pilots, and navigators are expected to demonstrate minimal competency in carrying out their daily functions.

Counsellors in the school and non-school settings are professional in the field of counselling, and are expected to have competencies in the areas of helping relationship, client assessment, human growth and development, and professional orientations and ethical practice. This researcher is interested to know if professional counsellors in school and non-school settings possess minimal competency to do their counselling work effectively in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Okonkwo [8] conducted a study on competency among school counsellors on the following areas: competencies on curriculum, responsive services, and system support. The study revealed that counsellors possessed minimal competencies. The variables under investigations in Okonkwo's study are not educational core areas of the counselling professions.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate counsellor competencies on the following educational core areas:

- Competencies in helping relationship
- Competencies in client assessment
- Competencies in human growth and development.

Research questions

Do counsellors in school and non-school settings possess competency in helping relationship?

Do counsellors in school and non-school settings possess competency in client assessment?

Do counsellors in school and non-school settings possess competency in human growth and development?

Hypotheses

For the purpose of this study, the following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level significance.

H01: There is no significant difference in competency level in the helping relationship among counsellors in school and non-school settings in Rivers State.

H02: There is no significant difference in competency level in client assessment among counsellors in school and non-school settings in Rivers State.

Scope of the Study

The study was limited to secondary school, and non-school settings counsellors in Rivers State. The study was, however, delimited to fifty (50) secondary schools with counsellors strength of fifty (50). While, non-school counsellors were limited to fifteen (15) organizations with counselor, strength of seventy (70).

Methodology

Research design

The research method utilized was the descriptive survey. The descriptive survey method was used because perception of the teachers' competencies was the primary concern of this investigation. The t-test statistics was used to test the four stated hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. Mean scores of 2.50 and above were considered acceptable competency level, while scores below 2.50 were unacceptable competency level.

Population of the study

The study consisted of one hundred and twenty (120) school counsellors and non-school counsellors.

Sample and sampling techniques

The researcher considered using purposive sampling techniques since the population was small, all (120) subjects were utilized.

Instrumentation

The instrument utilized for this study was on likert scale, which was a 4-point interval scale: Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. The scale was entitled "Counsellor Competency Assessment Rating Scale" (CCARS). The scale has three (3) sections: competency in helping relationship, competency in client assessment, and competency in human growth and development.

Validation of the instrument

The instrument "CCARS" was subjected to content and face validity by experts in measurement and evaluation in the Faculty of Education.

Reliability of the instrument

Test-Retest method was used to determine the reliability of the instrument. After the first administration of the instrument, an interval of two weeks was reached before the second administration. A correlation coefficient of 0.82 was reached.

Results

Mean scores of 2.50 and above were considered acceptable competency level, while scores below 2.50 were unacceptable competency level also shown in Tables 1-3.

Hypothesis 1: Was tested using the t-test statistics and the result is shown in Table 4.

The data in Table 4 showed that, the calculated t-value of school counsellors and non-school counsellors competency level in helping relationship was 2.40, while the critical t-value 1.96 at a degree of freedom of 118 at 0.05 level of confidence. Therefore, the null

hypothesis one was rejected, meaning that, there was significant difference between the level of competency of school counsellors and non-school counsellors. School counsellors also showed a higher mean value of 3.3 compared to lower mean value 2.2 of non-school setting counsellors.

S/No	Items	School Counsellors	Non-School Counsellors
1.	Counselling goals-orientation to wellness and prevention.	3.3	2.50
2.	Desired counsellors characteristics and behaviours	3.6	2.40
3.	Essential interviewing and counselling	3.4	2.40
4.	Counselling theories	3.0	2.00
5.	Understanding family and other systems	3.7	2.00
6.	Crises intervention	3.0	2.40

Table 1: Computation of the mean difference between School Counsellors and Non-School Counsellors Competency in helping Relationship. School Counsellors (50) Non-School Counsellors (70).

S/No	Items	School Counsellors	Non-School Counsellors
1.	Assessment in counselling	2.30	2.30
2.	Basic concept of psychological testing	2.40	2.20
3.	Statistical concept	2.40	2.30
4.	Instrumentation	2.20	2.00

Table 2: Computation of the mean difference between School Counsellors and Non-School Counsellors Competency in Client Assessment.

S/No	Items	School Counsellors	Non-School Counsellors
1.	Physical, cognitive, and psychosocial aspect of human development.	3.5	2.00
2.	Theories of learning and personality development.	3.5	2.20
3.	Knowledge of crises, trauma and disaster management.	3.0	2.40
4.	Understanding exceptional abilities	3.5	2.30

Table 3: Computation of the mean difference between School Counsellors and Non-School Counsellors' Competency in Human Growth and Development.

Variables	Respondents	N	Mean	STD DEV	STD Error	DF	P	t-cal	t-crit	Dec.
Helping Relationship	Sch. Counsellors	50	3.3	0.82	0.6886	118	0.05	2.40	1.96	Rej
	Non-School	70	2.2	0.64	.05361					

Table 4: The t-test Analysis of the mean and Standard Deviation of Competency Performance of School Counsellors and Non-School setting Counsellors in helping Relationship.

Hypothesis 2: Was tested using the t-test statistics and the result is shown in Table 5.

The data in Table 5 showed that, the calculated t-value of school counsellors and non-school setting counsellors competency level in human growth and development was 0.97, while the critical t-value 1.96 at degree of freedom 118 at 0.05 level of confidence. Therefore, the null hypothesis two was accepted, meaning that, there was no significant difference between the level of competence of school counsellors and non-school counsellors. Both school counsellors and non-school setting counsellors scored lower mean of 2.3 and 2.2 respectively.

Variables	Respondents	N	Mean	STD DEV	STD Error	DF	P	t-cal	t-crit	Dec.
Client Assessment	Sch. Counsellors	50	2.3	0.47	0.63	118	0.05	0.97	1.96	Accpt.
	Non-School	70	2.2	0.35	.058					

Table 5: The t-test Analysis of the mean and standard deviation of Competency Performance of Counsellors and Non-School Counsellors in Client Assessment.

Hypothesis 3: Was tested using the t-test statistics and the result is shown in Table 6.

Variables	Respondents	N	Mean	STD DEV	STD Error	DF	P	t-cal	t-crit	Dec.
Knowledge of human development and growth	Sch. Counsellors	50	3.37	0.82	0.6889	118	0.05	2.43	1.96	Sig. Reject null hypothesis
	Non-School	70	2.2	0.64	.05361					

Table 6: The t-test Analysis of the mean and standard deviation of Competency Performance of School Counsellors and Non-School Setting Counsellors in Human Development and growth.

Discussion

The findings of this study revealed that school counsellors demonstrated above average level of competencies in the areas of helping relationship. Counselling goals-orientation to wellness and prevention, desired counsellor characteristics and behaviours. While, non-school setting counsellors demonstrated below average competencies in the above mentioned areas.

Also, the finding revealed that both school counsellors and non-school setting counsellors demonstrated below average level of competencies in the areas of client assessment including historical perspective of assessment, basic concept of standardized and non-standardized testing. In addition, basic statistical concepts, including descriptive and inferential were demonstrated below average.

The study also revealed that, school counsellors demonstrated above average level of competencies, while non-school setting counsellors demonstrated below average competencies in the areas of human development and growth – physical, cognitive, and psychosocial aspect of human development. School counsellors demonstrated above average in competencies relating to theories of learning and personality development, while non-school setting counsellors demonstrated below average in the above categories. These findings were in line with [8-10].

Conclusion

Based on the above findings in this study, the researcher was poised to conclude that school counsellors were well trained in the areas of helping relationship, client assessment, and human development and growth. In most schools in Rivers State, school counsellors were also classroom teachers, as such were well prepared in the various aspects of academic training qualifying them to be counsellors.

The researcher, in addition, concluded that non-school setting counsellors may have been recruited without counselling related qualifications, such as, B.Sc, BA and B.Ed or advance degree in the field of counselling.

Recommendations

The government of Nigeria should encourage CASSON to start National Certification Programme for school and agency counsellors.

Colleges and universities offering programmes in counselling should encourage certification programmes for B.Sc and Masters Levels.

Core areas in counselling should be included in all colleges and universities curricula.

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