



Challenges and Remedies to Effective Counselling Practicumas Perceived by Postgraduate Student-Counsellors in Three Universities in South-East, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study sought specifically to find out challenges to effective counselling practicum in schools and their remedies as perceived by postgraduate student-counsellors in three universities in South-East, Nigeria. The design of the study was descriptive survey design. Two research questions and one null Hypothesis guided the study. A sample size of 120 students currently studying guidance and counselling at 2nd and 3rd degree levels out of a population of 142, selected using proportionate sampling technique participated in the study. A questionnaire that was duly validated and with reliability index values of 0.56 and 0.65, was used for data collection. Mean, standard deviation and t-test were used to analyze data. The findings were that lack of fund, inadequate pre-practicum preparation, uncondusive practicum environment (sites), students' ignorance about practicum supervision, inability to satisfy the needs of clients were perceived as the challenges. Solution included payment of practicum allowance, allowing students to choose practicum settings for themselves, strict supervision, provision of moral support and adequate simulation in micro practicum. There was no significant gender difference in the perception of the students. Based on the findings, discussion, conclusion and recommendations were made. One of the recommendations was that counsellor-educators on the universities staff should proactively encourage universities' management to be paying practicum allowance to the students to enable them procure practicum materials and be mentally prepared for the exercise.

Key words: Effective Counselling, Postgraduate Students, Counselling Practicum and Challenges

Introduction

Counselling is both a profession and an academic discipline. Counselling is psychology applied and it operates under very sound theoretical underpinning (Adeyewo, 2015). This means that counselling has its techniques and skills to be (learned and practiced) derived from its theories. According to United

Nations Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2003), counselling is both a planned intervention and a relationship between the professional called counsellor and client to help, change, improve or resolve present behaviour difficulty or discomfort of the client. It is one-on-one relationship that enables a client to communicate his

feelings, worries, suffering and concerns. In this type of relationship, the counsellor is like saying to the client: “your cure is my care,” meaning that both are in psychological contact in a way that promotes trust, safety, support and lasting change (Gesinde, 1993). This reveals that counselling is more of a practical educational construct. As a planned intervention, counselling involves a systematic series of actions or steps or stages directed towards some changes which take place in a definite manner (Nwaoba, 2017) in order to be effective. The word effective refers to producing the result that is wanted or intended. According to Wehmeier (2006), effective means producing a successful result. In other words, to be effective means to be result oriented. Effective counselling in this context is as Daolu (2013) defined it (Effective counselling) as result-oriented counselling. It is a counselling relationship handled with care; the outcome of which could only make and not mar the life of an individual (a client).

Effective counselling occurs when a client is successfully helped by a counsellor to understand himself, his environment and makes wise personally satisfying decisions and choices that lead to the resolution of his problems that have hitherto remained unresolved. Denga (2019) described effective counselling as a counselling process that yields positive result through the recognition of the worth and dignity of the client unconditionally and

basing counselling on the clients total development of his mental, vocational, emotional and personal-social aspects.

Effective counselling is facilitated by the counsellors acquisition of adequate experience in practical counselling. Such experience comes as a result of prior exposure to practical counselling (using counselling techniques, skills and tools to bring about intended outcome) which counselling practicum is also meant for. Other facilitative conditions for effective counselling include the assumptions of clients-centred theory of counselling on which the present study was based; such as provision of non-threatening environment by the counsellor that enables a client to re-organize his field of perception needed to solve his problem. Client-centred theory by Rogers in Okeke (2003) views man as being endowed with inherent goodness and rationality to live a fully productive life if only the appropriate conditions are provided and thus recommends that for effective counselling process to take place, the counsellor does not direct or control the client but helps him by providing at least six necessary conditions which include support, incongruence, genuineness (real), empathy (putting yourself in the client’s shoes as if the problems are yours), concreteness (not being abstract or not being emotionally removed from the client’s feelings and experiences) and unconditional positive regard (communication of acceptance, respect, interest,

understanding and liking for the client). Consequently, effective counselling practicum is concerned

Therefore, counselling does not only involve learning in the classroom but also putting learning into practice. Kolo (1996) defined counselling as a process of helping that involves a series of sequential steps, theories and techniques usually studied in institutions of higher learning such as universities.

In universities, school counselling is studied by students at different programmes (under graduate and post graduate programmes) under three main aspects viz educational, vocational and social –personal guidance and counselling. Education counselling covers the application of counselling skills to help learners function more effectively in their school programmes; vocational counselling involves procedures employed in helping students to choose career through provision of information on the world of work, enough self analysis, occupational surveys and others while social-personal counselling facilitates knowledge of self and others. It includes helping students in the many problems they experience in their families, schools and peer groups especially those that hinder effective learning and those that are more disturbing to the adolescents (Nwaoba, 2015).

School counselling services that students study and practicalize in

with learning to practice result-oriented counselling process by student-counsellors.

universities include counselling, orientation, appraisal, information, placement, follow-up, referral, research and evaluation and Home-Visits (Okeke, 2003). Students who are studying counselling at 2nd and 3rd degree levels are called postgraduate student-counsellors. This class of students have obtained their bachelor's degree from universities and are engaged in studies for a more advanced qualification (Isiwu and Asogwa, 2015). In the context of this study, postgraduate students are male and female individuals who have first degree in guidance and counselling or in other related degree courses and are studying for postgraduate masters or Doctorate (PhD) degree in Guidance and counselling.

The postgraduate students take some course works comprising classroom content and practical programme besides research project (thesis and dissertation), irrespective of gender. The classroom course work is called the didactic aspect of counselling programme while the practical aspect is called practicum (Gesinde, 1993, Okobia, 1993, Okoli, 2001, UNESCO, 2006 and Odoemenam, Otta, Ajoku and Woko, 2011). The didactic aspect of counselling programme usually comes first before the practicum. The idea is that before students are given the opportunity to go out for their

field experience in counselling, they would first of all, have been given the opportunity to gather their basic and theoretical constructs for organizing and administering such counselling practicum experience when they eventually go out.

The practicum aspect which is the focus of this study is more of a field work or internship meant for acquisition of experiences. It is not different from what doctors, nurses and pharmacists are usually exposed to during their course of study and they receive allowances (Anagbogu, 2004). Counselling practicum is regarded as the most important aspect of the process of training would-be guidance counsellors (Akinade, 2006). According to Okobia (1993) and Odoemenem *et al.*, (2011). Counselling practicum is the acquisition of counselling skills during training in real life situation. The goals of counselling practicum according to Akinade (2006) include to expose the counselors in training to the world of work, to help them acquire counselling skills in real life situation and to expose them to the realities of counselling profession. It enables a student to do self evaluation in the mastery of the use of counselling skills and techniques. This is because counselling practicum helps a student to weigh his strengths and weaknesses and correct mistakes he has made before becoming a professional.

Counselling practicum has two major aspects namely the micro practicum and the field based experience

known as macro practicum. The micro practicum takes place when the students are given the opportunity to rehearse in a simulation procedure all the essential courses such as courses on counselling skills, psychological testing and others in a micro practicum laboratory, with the trainers or counsellor-educators present to guide, critique and give corrections. This is done before commencing on a practicum exercise outside the university. The macro practicum begins with the posting of students to practicum settings which could be primary, secondary schools, hospitals, remand homes, child guidance clinics, prisons among others for a maximum of one semester and one year duration for masters and PhD respectively. The American Personnel and Guidance Association (2001) proposed that counsellor-interns are expected to choose appropriate practicum settings for themselves. Nwoye in Odeomenam *et al.*, (2011) opined that posting a student to practicum site not chosen by the student could be counter-productive.

A close observation reveals that most students are often rejected by the schools. Some are allowed to practice in an uncondusive environment (without office accommodation) while some are offered to teach a school subject or face unco-operating relationship with staff and students, yet they are expected to be physically and mentally committed to the practicum exercise.

While the practicum is going on, students are assigned supervisors who supervise their counselling activities, especially listening to recorded cases handled by the counsellor intern and award marks objectively because it is a requirement for the award of a degree in Guidance and counselling. American Personnel and Guidance Association (APGA), (2001) and Mckary (2008) related that the supervisors should give students who are present during supervision group encouragement and moral support.

Students are equally expected to go to practicum sites with practicum materials which they must pay for. Examples of practicum materials are activity books, diaries, log book, psychological tests, tape recorders, card board sheets, cassettes, posters and others. This could have informed Kolo's (1996) and Akinades' (2006) assertions that effective counselling practicum demands enough fund at least to procure the practicum materials.

Counseling practicum ends with organization of a career day by the practicum students. Career day exposes counsellor in training to the service of obtaining valid and usable information for informed vocational decision. Mckary (2008) and Okobia (1996) related that most practicum students are ignorant of the expectations of practicum supervisors. Odoemenam *et al* (2011) reported that attendance, regularity, punctuality rates and

participation in the career day are supervised. If practicum supervision is a factor militating against effective counselling practicum in schools is not yet established. The researchers are interested in finding out from the students the challenges to successful counselling practicum in schools.

Where counselling practicum is well organized, it gives the student trainees adequate experience that helps them to carry out effective counselling even after graduation. Counselling practicum programme evaluates the whole counsellor training/education which shows whether the programme is successful or not. Its failure is to the discredit of the university while its success is to the credit of the university organizing it. Unfortunately, counselling practicum seems to be under criticism in the recent times in terms of its operational mode (Oladele, 2017).

Many students feel reluctant to procure the practicum materials and tools for effective practicum experiences. Effective counselling practicum is learning to engage in result-oriented counselling process. Their regularity and punctuality rates at their practicum schools are questionable (Odoemenam *et al.*, (2011); yet it is a major requirement for the award of a degree in guidance and counselling. It is therefore necessary to find out from the students who have gone or are currently doing counselling practicum the challenges to effective counselling practicum, for proper

remediation. Hence the need for this study.

The purpose of the study was to find out the challenges and remedies to effective counselling practicum in three public universities in South-East Nigeria. Specifically the study sought to:

1. find out challenges to effective counselling practicum.
2. Ascertain remedies to the challenges.

Methodology

The study employed descriptive survey design. Descriptive survey design according to Lock and Tonja (2012) is used to gather information largely with the use of questionnaire as its best method of collecting data. In this study, questionnaire was used to collect information from the respondents.

The study was situated in South-East, Nigeria using post-graduate student-counsellors in 3 universities (Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Imo State University, Owerri and Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike). South-East is one of the Geo-political zones in Nigeria. South-East is made up of five States namely Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo States. Nine out of Ten universities in south-east offer Education Guidance and

The research questions that guided this study are:

1. What is the perception of postgraduate student-counsellors on challenges to effective counselling practicum in universities?
2. What is the students' perception on the remedy to the challenges?

H₀₁: There is no significant gender difference in the perception of postgraduate student-counsellors on challenges to effective counselling practicum ($p < 0.05$)

Counselling both at undergraduate and post graduate levels.

The population comprised all the male and female post-graduate student-counsellors in 3 universities in South-East, Nigeria from 2014-2017 academic sessions. The population figure is 142 comprising 82 M.Ed and 51 PhD students (MOUAU = 43, NAU = 59 and IMSU = 40) (Field survey, 2018).

A sample size of 120 (92 females and 28 males) post-graduate student-counsellors selected on the basis of availability at the time of visits by the researchers was used. Purposive sampling technique was used to select 40 students from each of the 3 universities.

A questionnaire titled challenges and remedies to effective counselling practicum questionnaire (CERCPQ) designed by the researchers was used

to collect data. CERCPQ has three sections –A, B and C. A has the personal data of the respondents while section B and C have 10 items each according to the 2 research questions that guided the study. The items were designed on a -4 point rating scale of strongly agree (SA) Agree (A) Disagree (D) and strongly Disagree (SD). Their weights are 4,3,2 and 1 respectively.

Validation of the instrument

CERCPQ instrument was face and content validated by three professionals in Guidance and Counselling and Measurement and Evaluation, Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike. Corrections given by the professionals were employed in modifying the items in the final copy of the questionnaire.

Reliability index of the questionnaire was established using test re-test method. Data collected from the two administrations of the instrument on fifteen available postgraduate students of guidance and

Results

Research question 1: What is the perception of postgraduate student-

counselling, University of Uyo were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment correlation procedure. Internal consistency reliability coefficient values of 0.56 and 0.65 were obtained.

One hundred and twenty questionnaire copies were administered to the respondents and collected on the spot by the researchers with the help of two trained research assistants. One hundred and twenty copies were administered and one hundred and twenty copies were retrieved.

Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions. The cut-off mean was 2.50, calculated by dividing the sum of weights with 4 ie $\frac{4+3+2+1}{4} = \frac{10}{4} = 2.50$.

T-test was used to test the hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance. The criterion was to reject H_0 if t-Cal is greater than t-crit. And do not H_0 if t-cal is less than t-critat 0.05 level of significance.

counsellors on the challenges to effective counselling practicum in school?

Table 1: Perception of the students on the challenges

| S/N | ITEM Description | RESPONSES | | | | | | DECISION |
|-----|--|--------------|------------|--------------|------------|------|------|----------|
| | | SA | A | D | SD | X | SD | |
| 1. | Scarcity of qualified supervisors | 8 (48) | 2 (6) | 100 (200) | 10 (10) | 2.01 | 0.01 | Disagree |
| 2. | Non-availability of large number of students to be served | 12 (48) | 1 (3) | 86 (172) | 21 (21) | 2.03 | 0.06 | Disagree |
| 3. | Problem of long distance to practicum sites | 24 (96) | 8 (24) | 84 (168) | 4 (4) | 2.43 | 0.12 | Disagree |
| 4. | Lack of fund to procure materials | 98 (396) | 14 (42) | 81 (16) | - (-) | 3.7 | 0.01 | Agree |
| 5. | Ignorance about practicum supervision | 79 (316) | 21 (42) | 15 (30) | 5 (5) | 3.38 | 0.1 | Agree |
| 6. | Unconducive practicum environment (lack of office accommodation) | 100 (400) | 10 (30) | 6 (12) | 4 (4) | 3.72 | 0.03 | Agree |
| 7. | Inability to satisfy needs of students | 82 (328) | 14 (42) | 11 (22) | 13 (13) | 3.38 | 0.1 | Agree |
| 8. | Inadequate pre-practicum preparation | 89 (356) | 16 (48) | 4 (8) | 11 (11) | 3.53 | 0.06 | Agree |
| 9. | Lack of good relationship between supervisor and counsellor trainees | 30 (120) | 9 (27) | 4 (8) | 77 (77) | 1.93 | 0.01 | Disagree |
| 10. | Lack of practicum time table | 12 (48) | 10 (30) | 50 (100) | 48 (48) | 1.9 | 0.14 | Disagree |

Data on table 1 show that items 4,5,6,7 and 8 have their respective mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50, indicating agreement while items 1,2,3,9 and 10 have mean scores below 2.50 cut-off point; indicating disagreement. Their SDs ranges from 0.01 to 0.13; indicating closeness in opinion. Therefore students' perception is that the challenges are: lack of fund,

unconducive practicum environment, inability to satisfy students' needs, inadequate pre-practicum preparation and ignorance about practicum supervision.

Research question 2: What is the postgraduate student-counsellors' perception on the remedy to challenges to effective counselling practicum in schools?

Table 2: responses of the students on the remedy to the challenges

| S/N | Item Description | Responses | | | | | | Decision |
|-----|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|------------|------|------|----------|
| | | SA | A | D | SA | X | SD | |
| 11. | Payment of practicum allowance to practicum students only | 21 (84) | 14 (42) | 79 (158) | 6 (6) | 2.42 | 0.04 | Disagree |
| 12. | Payment of practicum allowance to both students and supervisors | 86 (344) | 30 (90) | 3 (6) | 1 (1) | 3.34 | 0.02 | Agree |
| 13. | Allowing students to choose practicum settings | 99 (396) | 11 (33) | 6 (12) | 4 (4) | 3.71 | 0.07 | Agree |
| 14. | Strict supervision by the supervisors | 72 (288) | 25 (100) | 10 (20) | 13 (13) | 3.50 | 0.02 | Agree |
| 15. | Provision of adequate Micro practicum | 64 (256) | 40 (120) | 8 (16) | 8 (8) | 3.33 | 0.13 | Agree |
| 16. | Provision of moral support to students during supervision | 11 (44) | 6 (18) | 48 (96) | 65 (65) | 2.70 | 0.05 | Agree |
| 17. | Provision of adequate information about practicum supervision | 92 (368) | 18 (54) | 6 (12) | 5 (5) | 3.66 | 0.01 | Agree |
| 18. | Free supply of practicum materials by the supervisors | 7 (28) | 2 (6) | 58 (116) | 53 (53) | 1.69 | 0.03 | Disagree |
| 19. | Allowing students to be paying occasional visits to the practicum sites | 28 (112) | 16 (48) | 56 (112) | 20 (20) | 2.43 | 0.01 | Disagree |
| 20. | Non-supervision of counselling practicum | 10 (40) | 1 (3) | 50 (100) | 59 (59) | 1.68 | 0.03 | Disagree |

Data on table 2 show that items 12,13,14,15,16 and 17 have their respective mean scores highly above the cut-off mean of 2.50, indicating agreement. Their SDs range from 0.01 to 0.13, indicating that respondents are not far from each other in their perception. Items 11, 18, 19 and 20 have their mean score

below 2.50 cut-off mean, indicating disagreement.

H₀: There is no significant gender difference in the mean scores of post graduate student-counsellors on the challenges to effective counselling practicum (P<0.05).

Table 3: t-test analysis of the mean ratings of male and female students on the challenges.

| Groups | N | X | SD | DF | t-cal | t-crit | Decision |
|--------|----|------|------|-----|-------|--------|--------------------|
| Male | 28 | 2.24 | 1.03 | 118 | 0.73 | 1.96 | H ₀ not |
| Female | 92 | 2.16 | 1.24 | | | | rejected |

Not significant at 0.05

Data on table 3 show that t-cal of 0.73 is less than t-crit of 1.96 at 118 degree of freedom and 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the hypothesis of no difference in the

perception of male and female students on the challenges to effective counselling practicum in schools is accepted.

Discussion of findings

The findings of the study that lack of fund, ignorance about practicum supervision, unconducive practicum environment are among the challenges are in line with McKary (2008) who related that organizing effective counselling practicum requires fund; Okobia (1993) who opined that most practicum students are ignorant about practicum supervisions and Nwoye in Odoemenam *et. al.*(2011) who posited that posting students to practicum sites not chosen by them often leads to practicing in an

unconducive environment respectively.

The respondents also perceived that inability to satisfy clients' needs and inadequate pre-practicum preparation are among the challenges to effective practicum. These findings could be as a result of the fact that practicum has a duration. It is not impossible that clients' problems especially complicated ones that could take several sessions might not be adequately handled to the satisfaction of both clients and counsellors in training before practicum ends. Again, most

universities do not have well equipped micro practicum laboratory for enough simulation exercise. Students could therefore, perceive pre-practicum preparation as inadequate. T-test analysis of the mean ratings of the students confirmed that the challenges are the same in the perception of both male and female post graduate student-counsellors. This is expected because practicum in all the universities in south-East seems to have the same mode of operation.

The findings that payment of practicum allowance to both students and supervisors, giving the students opportunity to choose their practicum settings and strict supervision as well as adequate information about practicum

Conclusion and Recommendations

The challenges to effective counselling practicum include lack of fund, ignorance, unconducive practicum environment, inadequate pre-practicum preparation and others. The remedies to the challenges include payment of practicum allowance to both students and supervisors, giving students the opportunity to choose their practicum settings, strict supervision of practicum, provision of adequate pre-practicum experience and moral support to the students.

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made

supervision as among the remedies, agree with Nwoye in Odoemenam et al (2011), APGA (2001) and Oladele (2017) who asserted that effective counselling practicum requires money, students should be allowed to choose appropriate practicum settings for themselves and that practicum in the recent times is under criticism in its operational mode respectively.

Another finding that giving moral support to students during practicum is supported by the America Personnel and Guidance Association (APGA, 2001) when it proposed that students who present themselves during supervision ought to be given group encouragement and moral support.

1. Counsellor-educators on the universities' staff should proactively encourage universities' management to consider paying practicum allowance to both supervisors and supervisees.
2. Practicum supervisors should be applying strictness in their supervision that would enforce seriousness in the counsellors in training.
3. Emphasis should be laid on practicum supervision expectations by the trainers during practicum orientation.
4. Utilization of counselling tools such as psychological tests and their interpretation should be taught to the student-counsellors severally

- before the commencement of practicum proper.
5. Counsellor trainers should allow the student trainees to choose appropriate practicum settings for themselves to enable them practice under conducive environment of their own choice.
 6. Practicum supervisors should motivate practicum students especially those they supervise by giving them encouragement and moral support.

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