

Professional Development and Experience as Determinants of Counselling Perceived Effectiveness among Selected School Counsellors in Southwestern, Nigeria

Oderinde Olayinka Ibiyemi

Department of Guidance and Counseling, University of Ibadan, Oyo State
E-mail: layinkaoderinde@yahoo.com

Muraina Kamilu Olanrewaju

Department of Guidance and Counseling, University of Ibadan, Oyo State
E-mail: muraina_kamilu@yahoo.com

Abstract

Counseling must have existed in one form or another since the very beginning of human civilization. Man must have sought comfort, help and solace from the family and close associates. Children were brought up in a neatly woven relationship of the extended family in African Traditional Societies. The society had counselors who included aunts, uncles, and grandparents. However the home as one avenue of instilling sex education is challenged by modern constraints such as shattered cultural basis of child upbringing, rising standards of living, economic constraints, and inadequate family guidance and counseling, child headed homes, wars, tribal clashes, cattle rustling, displacement and moral conflict. The purpose of this study was to investigate professional development and experience as determinants of counselling perceived effectiveness among selected school counsellors in Southwestern, Nigeria. Descriptive research design of ex-post-facto type was used in the study. Five hundred (500) respondents were selected from secondary schools in selected five States (i.e, Ogun States, Osun States, Oyo States, Lagos States and Ekiti States) in Southwestern, Nigeria. The respondents were measured with relevant standardized scales strong reliability coefficient and the data obtained was analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) and Multiple Regression statistical analysis of the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS). Three research hypotheses and two research questions were raised and answered in the study. The result showed that counselling effectiveness is significantly correlated with professional development ($r = .623$; $p < .05$) and experience ($r = .833$; $p < .05$), independent variables when pulled together have significant contribution to on the counsellors' perceived effectiveness (R (adjusted) = .719 and R^2 (adjusted) = .893) and each of the independent variables made a significant contribution to the prediction of counsellors' perceived effectiveness. In term of magnitude of contribution, professional development made the most significant contribution (Beta = .813; $t = 1.094$; $P < 0.05$) to the prediction follow by experience (Beta = .608; $t = 6.129$; $P < 0.05$). On the strength of these findings, it was stressed and advocated that the schools should develop enabling environment for counsellors' need and development, the enlightenment of counsellors in the school on the need to improve their professional development, because this has a great impact in their perceived effectiveness and the parents/guardians also need to be trained on the need to monitor the students and give adequate emotional caring for them. This will help in complementing the efforts of counselors to materialize in the school.

Keywords: Professional Development, Experience, Counselling Perceived Effectiveness, School Counsellors

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

Counseling must have existed in one form or another since the very beginning of human civilization. Man must have sought comfort, help and solace from the family and close associates. Children were brought up in a neatly woven relationship of the extended family in African Traditional Societies. The society had counselors who included aunts, uncles, and grandparents. However the home as one avenue of instilling sex education is challenged by modern constraints such as shattered cultural basis of child upbringing, rising standards of living, economic constraints, and inadequate family guidance and counseling, child headed homes, wars, tribal clashes, cattle rustling, displacement and moral conflict. As a result, issues of adolescent sexuality are increasingly being entrusted with the school.

The recent complex changes and education trends in the world work and society calls for proper implementation of guidance and counseling services in Nigeria particularly in the school system. Some of these trends are unstable homes, poor academic performance, drug abuse, high risk sexual exploitation, cultism, kidnapping e.t.c of latest concern to the government and stakeholders of education is the trend where some graduates of primary school and secondary school are unable to pass common entrance examinations into secondary and tertiary levels. Also, some graduates of the tertiary institutions are no longer fit into the labor

market because of unemployment and underemployment among others. This trend calls for proper implementation of Guidance and Counseling services in Nigeria, to remedy the sorry situation. The Federal Government in realization of this need has in the National Policy on Education (2004), stated that it is desirable to provide Guidance Counselors in each post-primary secondary school in Nigeria. Also, Fafunwa (1990) supported the idea as Minister of Education by saying that a mandatory student Guidance and Counseling Service should be established in all Nigerian Institutions of Higher learning because through such services, the true conditions of the Nigeria Economy and its ever increasing labor market demands will be met by students as employees or employers of labor in both the formal and informal sectors of the economy.

According to Butler and Constantine (2005), counselors' perceptions of themselves as members of the counseling profession can impact their competence as counselors and client-counselor relationships. School counselors' professional development or collective identity refers to their evaluations of and identification with the social group (e.g., the school counseling profession) to which they belong (Katz, Swindell, & Farrow, 2004). That is, professional development relates to how school counselors identify themselves in the school counseling profession (Crocker, Luhtanen, Baine, & Broadnax, 1994). It is important to note that even though a school counselor obtains a professional position, the position alone may not help promote the school counselor's sense of collective identity (Gale & Austin, 2003). It is essential to identify professional school counselors' sense of collective identity within their profession. Collective identity directly relates to attitudes toward jobs and services offered to students (Brott & Myers, 1999). Recent research indicates professional development is related to school counselors' relationship with clients and their feelings of personal accomplishment (Butler & Constantine, 2005; Yu, Lee, & Lee, 2007). Counselors experiencing a strong sense of collective identity are less likely to carry apathetic attitudes toward their clients even when they are dissatisfied with their jobs. Alternatively, positive professional perceptions contribute to feelings of professional accomplishment. Overall, how one identifies oneself in the school counseling profession can be an important factor in understanding the effectiveness of school counselors.

Peterson, Goodman, Keller, & Mccauley (2004) describes school counselors as highly trained educators in counselling who uphold ethical and professional standards to design, implement and manage comprehensive, developmental, results-based school counseling programs that promote and enhance student success. This definition accentuates the strong connection between school counseling and education. Proponents of prior teaching experience argue that experience is necessary for effective school counselors to fully understand the school system and the environment in which they work (Hobson, Fox, & Swikert, 2000; Smith, Crutchfield, & Culbreath, 2001). They further purport that school counselors may not be fully accepted by teachers if they have not "walked the walk" and "talked the talk" (Burnham & Stansell, 2005; Hobson, Fox, & Swikert, 2000; Quarto 1999). One contention is that counselors without classroom teaching experience may not be as effective or comfortable in conducting classroom guidance (Bringman & Lee, 2008; Hobson, Fox, & Swikert, 2000).

In contrast, opponents contend that the prior teaching prerequisite may deter otherwise highly qualified candidates from entering the field (Bringman & Lee, 2008; Hobson, Fox, & Swikert, 2000). This argument, coupled with research that identified professionals with classroom teaching experience as having less favorable interviewing skills (Baker, 1994), adds to the overall discussion of whether or not prior classroom teaching experience is a necessity to being an effective school counselor. Correspondingly, researchers have indicated constituents within schools also have differing views about the necessity of prior teaching experience. Olsen and Allen (1993) noted that principals and other school administrators saw no significant difference in the effectiveness of school counselors with and without teaching experience. In contrast, teachers seem to believe that school counselors with previous classroom teaching experience are most effective (Smith, Crutchfield, & Culbreth, 2001). School counselor educators are also divided on the issue (Hobson, Fox, & Swickert, 2000). When surveyed, 75% of those interviewed believed prior teaching experience to be unnecessary, and deficits could be remedied through school counselor training programs. The remaining 25% viewed prior teaching experience as vital to successful school counseling (Smith et al., 2001).

This dichotomous thinking is supported by Hobson, Fox, and Swikert (2000) in examining a shortage of school counselors in Michigan, found that there are two very different schools of thought regarding school counselors duties. One school postulates school counselors are first educators that provide limited mental health practices. There are currently five states that require teaching experience as a prerequisite for school counseling certification (Peterson, Goodman, Keller, & Mccauley, 2004). The above mentioned states typically call for two years of teaching experience before applicants can receive school counselor certification. Kansas, Louisiana, and North Dakota (2010) require school counselors to be eligible for teacher certification, but do not indicate actual teaching experience as a requirement. In contrast, several other states such as Arizona, Arkansas, Connecticut, Delaware, Maryland, Mississippi, New Hampshire, Tennessee, and Wisconsin (2011) provide alternative options for school counseling criteria. These include supervised internships and other related work experience. Although state control over credentialing may be considered a valuable asset by the states, portability of certification has become increasingly problematic for those in the field. As such, the present study concentrates on professional

development and experience as determinants of counselling perceived effectiveness among selected school counsellors in Southwestern, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Over the past 50 years, school counseling professionals have engaged in active dialogue regarding the professional identity and training of school counselors. A continuously debated issue among professionals is the requirement of previous teaching experience for school counselor certification. Approximately 23 states initially adopted credentialing plans that endorsed this requirement (Baker, 1994). Prior teaching was reputedly indispensable in spite of conflicting research. More recent literature (Peterson, Goodman, Keller, & McCauley, 2004) indicates both teachers and non-teachers face similar challenges in the first years of their school counseling experience.

Although studies have been made to bring universality to credentialing standards, the need for more standardization exists. There is still some difference in opinion concerning prerequisites, particularly as it relates to the role of classroom teaching experience in the credentialing process. This discussion remains at the forefront of credentialing issues. It divides professionals within the field and ultimately weakens the school counseling profession as a whole. Given that only a few states currently require teaching experience prior to certification, and given the diversity among state requirements, the present research met an important need. Is prior teaching experience related to school counselors' perceived effectiveness. For the purpose of this study, the researchers examined professional development and experience as determinants of counselling perceived effectiveness among selected school counsellors in Southwestern, Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to investigate professional development and experience as determinants of counselling perceived effectiveness among selected school counsellors in Southwestern, Nigeria. Specifically, other purposes of the study include: to examine the significant relationship among the independent variables (professional development and experience) and counselling perceived effectiveness, determine the joint contribution of independent variables (professional development and experience) on counselling perceived effectiveness and find out the relative contribution of independent variables (professional development and experience) on counselling perceived effectiveness.

Research Questions

1. What is the significant relationship among the independent variables (professional development and experience) and counselling perceived effectiveness?
2. What is the joint contribution of independent variables (professional development and experience) on counselling perceived effectiveness? and
3. What is the relative contribution of independent variables (professional development and experience) on counselling perceived effectiveness?

Significance of the Study

This study will be highly important to the government at all level, the counselling psychologists, educational planners, decision and policy makers as well as other stakeholder in education. However, this study will help the public and private schools to know and ascertain the contributions of professional development and experience on counselling perceived effectiveness, thereby making the schools to develop appropriate strategies to enhance counselling perceived effectiveness in the school system.

The study will provide an insight understanding for the school counselling psychologist to know the contributions of professional development and experience on counselling perceived effectiveness, this will help them to develop effective skills toward enhancement counselling perceived effectiveness. The study of this type will further enable the counselling trainees to discover the contributions of professional development and experience on their counselling perceived effectiveness during and after their practicum on the field. Through this study, the students, school counselors, teachers as well as other stake holders in education will be able to know effects of professional development and experience on counselling perceived effectiveness. This will help in the common efforts to advocate for the counselling perceived effectiveness and efficacy.

The professional development and experience as determinants of counselling perceived effectiveness among selected school counsellors will enable the government and the general public to be aware of the effects of these factors and work towards better improvement. It is important to note that findings in this study will also serve as a source of reference for other researchers who may want to conduct the same or similar study in other subjects in any part of the country.

Scope of the Study

The study examines the professional development and experience as determinants of counselling perceived effectiveness among selected school counsellors. Due to financial and materials constraints, this study covers selected schools counsellors in five (5) States out of six (6) states that constitute the south West, Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

This chapter deals with research design, population, sample and sampling procedures, instrumentations, procedure for data collection and method of data analysis.

Research Design

The research design used in this study is descriptive study. It is going to ascertain the effects of the independent variable (professional development and experience) on the dependent variable (counselling perceived effectiveness) without manipulations. However, it is carefully observed and recorded information as it naturally occurred at the time the study was conducted.

Population

The population for the study comprises of all school counsellors in Southwestern, Nigeria.

Sample and Sampling Procedures

The sample for this study comprises five hundred (500) participants which were randomly selected from secondary school schools in selected five States (i.e, Ogun States, Osun States, Oyo States, Lagos States and Ekiti States) in Southwestern, Nigeria. One hundred (100) school counselors were selected from selected states through simple random sampling technique. On the whole, five hundred (500) school counsellors were selected for this study. This consists of both male and female counsellors. (i.e. Two hundred and ninety seven (297) female and two hundred and three (203) male.

Instrumentations

In the attempt to measure professional development and experience as determinants of counselling perceived effectiveness among selected school counsellors, a self developed questionnaire was developed. This consists of three sections (that is section A-C). Section A measured the demographical aspect of the respondents, Section B measured the professional development of counselors and Section C measured the perceived counseling effectiveness. This instrument consists of thirty three (33) items, responses anchored base on four (4) likert points. The instrument was however revalidated and the result yielded internal consistency of .76 and Cronbach alpha of .87 which were considered to be appropriate for the use in the study.

Procedure for Data Collection

The instruments were administered to the participants on the day approved by the school authorities for the exercise. The researcher was assisted by research assistants in the administration and collection of the instruments. In each of selected school, the administration and collection of instruments was done on the same day of administration. On the whole data collection lasted for approximately two weeks.

Method Data Analysis

The multiple regression and Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) statistical analysis were used to analyse the data. The multiple regression analysis yielded correlation matrix, analysis of variance among others which was used to interpret the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This chapter presents the results and summary of findings. The study investigated the professional development and experience as determinants of counselling perceived effectiveness among selected school counsellors in Southwestern, Nigeria. Three Research Questions were raised and answered. The data were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMC) and multiple regression statistical method. The results are presented below:

Research Question One: What is the significant relationship among the independent variables (professional development and experience) and counselling perceived effectiveness?

Table 1: Descriptive statistics and Inter-correlations among the variables

Variables	N	Mean	SD	Counselling Effectiveness	Professional Development	Experience
Counselling Effectiveness	500	55.54	28.37	1.00		
Professional Development	500	31.44	10.50	.623	1.00	
Experience	500	20.94	15.63	.833	.574	1.00

Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Table 1 contains descriptive statistics and inter-correlations among the study variables. As shown in the table 1, counselling effectiveness is significantly correlated with: (1) Professional Development ($r = .623$; $p < .05$) and (2) Experience ($r = .833$; $p < .05$). There were also significant correlations among the independent variables. In line with this finding, Olsen and Allen (1993) noted that principals and other school administrators saw no significant difference in the effectiveness of school counselors with and without teaching experience. In contrast, teachers seem to believe that school counselors with previous classroom teaching experience are most effective (Smith, Crutchfield, & Culbreth, 2001). School counselor educators are also divided on the issue (Hobson, Fox, & Swickert, 2000).

Research Question Two: What is the joint contribution of independent variables (professional development and experience) on counselling perceived effectiveness?

Table 2: Multiple Regression Analysis on Counsellors' Perceived Effectiveness Data

Multiple R (adjusted)=.719				
Multiple R ² (adjusted)=.893				
Standard error of estimate= 38.45				
Analysis of variance				
	Sum of square (SS)	DF	Mean square	F
Regression	987544.29	2	493772.15	79.93
Residual	73558.22	497	148.00	
Total	1061102.51	499		

The table above shows that the independent variables when pulled together have significant effect on the counsellors' perceived effectiveness. The value of R (adjusted) = .719 and R² (adjusted) = .893. The analysis of variance performed on the multiple regressions yielded an F- ratio value of 79.93 and was found to be significant at 0.05 level. In collaboration with this finding Hobson, Fox, and Swikert (2000) in examining a shortage of school counselors in Michigan, found that there are two very different schools of thought regarding school counselors duties. One school postulates school counselors are first educators that provide limited mental health practices. There are currently five states that require teaching experience as a prerequisite for school counseling certification (Peterson, Goodman, Keller, & Mccauley, 2004). The above mentioned states typically call for two years of teaching experience before applicants can receive school counselor certification. When surveyed, 75% of those interviewed believed prior teaching experience to be unnecessary, and deficits could be remedied through school counselor training programs. The remaining 25% viewed prior teaching experience as vital to successful school counseling (Smith et al., 2001). In contrast, opponents contend that the prior teaching prerequisite may deter otherwise highly qualified candidates from entering the field (Bringman & Lee, 2008; Hobson, Fox, & Swikert, 2000). This argument, coupled with research that identified professionals with classroom teaching experience as having less favorable interviewing skills (Baker, 1994), adds to the overall discussion of whether or not prior classroom teaching experience is a necessity to being an effective school counselor. Correspondingly, researchers have indicated constituents within schools also have differing views about the necessity of prior teaching experience.

Research Question Three: What is the relative contribution of independent variables (professional development and experience) on counselling perceived effectiveness?

Table 3: Relative Contribution of Independent Variables to the Prediction

Model	Unstandardized coefficients	Standardized coefficients		T	Sig	P
	B	Standard error	Beta			
Constant	27.68	5.521		5.013	0.00	P<0.05
Professional Development	4.10	.451	.813	1.094	0.01	P<0.05
Experience	2.36	.385	.608	6.129	0.00	P<0.05

The table above shows that each of the independent variables made a significant contribution to the prediction of counsellors' perceived effectiveness. In term of magnitude of contribution, Professional Development made the most significant contribution (Beta= .813; $t= 1.094$; $P<0.05$) to the prediction follow by Experience (Beta= .608; $t= 6.129$; $P<0.05$). In collaboration with this study Kansas, Louisiana, and North Dakota (2010) require school counselors to be eligible for teacher certification, but do not indicate actual teaching experience as a requirement. In contrast, several other states such as Arizona, Arkansas, Connecticut, Delaware, Maryland, Mississippi, New Hampshire, Tennessee, and Wisconsin (2011) provide alternative options for school counseling criteria. These include supervised internships and other related work experience. Although state control over credentialing may be considered a valuable asset by the states, portability of certification has become increasingly problematic for those in the field.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Base on the findings of this study, persistent counselling ineffectiveness of Nigerian adolescents due to some factors (i.e should not continue indefinitely. There is hope that with the improvement of professional development and experience, the situation can be changed for the better. The study discovered that professional development and experience influence significantly the counsellors' perceived effectiveness in the society. As such, it is very crucial to improve these factors so as to eradicate the persistent occurrence of reports of counsellors' perceived effectiveness not only in Southwestern but also in other geo-political zones in this great country, Nigeria.

There is need for the schools to develop enabling environment for counsellors' need and development in the school. This is to ensure an improvement in their perceived effectiveness and efficiency in the schools. There is need for the enlightenment of counsellors in the school on the need to improve their professional development, because this has a great impact in their perceived effectiveness in the school.

The parents and guardians also need to be trained on the need to monitor the students and give adequate emotional caring for them. This will help in complementing the efforts of counselors to materialize in the school. The adolescent/educational psychologists should always intensify their effort to organize seminars and workshops for the preservice counsellor, adolescents and other significant stakeholders in society on the implication of these psychosocial factors on the counsellors' perceived effectiveness. The curriculum planners should try as much as possible to include in the scheme counseling and counselling effectiveness and development for the students. This will help to reduce the level of adolescents involvement in delinquent behaviour.

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