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Extent of Solution-Focused Psychotherapy and Self-Efficacy in Enhancing Professional Competence of Secondary School Counsellors in Enugu Education Zone of Enugu State, Nigeria.

Onuorah A.E., Aniakor K.C. and Onovo Amos O.

Department of Guidance and Counselling Faculty of Education Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Enugu State, Nigeria.

ABSTRACT

This study investigated the extent to which Solution-Focused Psychotherapy and Self-efficacy enhances professional competence of secondary school counsellors in Enugu Education Zone Enugu of state. Two research questions were raised to guide the study. The descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population for the study is the 59 school counsellors serving in the 31 government own secondary schools in Education Zone of Enugu State. The population is small and manageable so no sampling was done. A self-structured instrument developed by the researchers called Solution-Focused Psychotherapy and Self-Efficacy Scale (SFPSE-S). 11 items was used to collect data from the study. It was validated by three experts and its internal consistency ascertained using Cranach Alpha reliability estimate. Mean, grand mean and standard deviation were used to analyze the data collected. It was found among others that solution-focused psychotherapy and self-efficacy enhances secondary school counsellors in Enugu Education Zone of Enugu State, Nigeria to a great extent. It was recommended that seminars be organized for secondary school counsellors on the implications of solution-focused psychotherapy as effective interventions towards enhancing professional competency of secondary school counsellors.

Keywords Solution, psychotherapy, counselors and professional competence.

INTRODUCTION

There is no human being that has never got a problem at one point or another. Once a problem arises, one seeks solutions, suggestions or even other peoples' opinions about the problem. In one way or another, one seeks for guidance and counselling services. Guidance and counselling has been engraved in African traditional society since time immemorial. According to [1], guidance and counselling was entrusted to the immediate and extended family where individuals confined in and depended upon their relatives for advice when

faced with problems. Today's youths are confronted with a rapidly changing world of work and labour force, violence in the home, school and community, divorce, teenage suicide, substance abuse, and sexual experimentation among others. Thus, there is the dire need for professionally competent counsellors in our schools whose sole duty is to assist students to cope with these crucial issues and the normal development tasks adolescents face in life.

Professional Counselling in developing countries is relatively a new field but fast gaining strength with a lot of challenges slowing its progress. In Nigeria for instance, traditional and informal counselling has been in existence even before the inception of the nation because man naturally, always needs to be helped with some pieces of advice. Guidance and counselling services are very important tools in human development especially during adolescent stage. According to [2] guidance and counselling is the assistance made available by qualified and trained persons to an individual of any age to help him to manage his own life activities, develop his own points of view, make his own decisions and carry his own burden. In addition, [3] stated that the purpose of guidance and counselling in schools is to improve academic achievement, foster positive study attitudes and habits, increase acquisitions and application of conflict resolution skills, and decrease school drop out. Lack of guidance and counselling in adolescence has resulted to increase in unpleasant outcomes in the society. These include school drop outs, drug abuse, crimes, and even failure to secure jobs [4]; [5] and [6].

According to [7], there are many factors that hamper the successful implementation of guidance and counselling in schools. They are lack of formal training in counselling, professional competence, lack of time for guidance and counselling, lack of support given to teacher counsellors and lack of resources among others. In the United States of America, school counsellors complain that counsellor-learner ratios are too high and as such this negatively affects guidance and counselling services in curbing indiscipline cases in

schools [3]. The recent complex changes and educational trends in the world of work and society calls for proper implementation of guidance and counselling 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 and kidnapping among others 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 [6] and [7].

Developing professional competence is a lifelong task, requiring ongoing commitment to the process of personal and professional development. The development of effective practice in guidance counselling depends on the presence of attitudes reflecting openness to alternative approaches, an appreciation of diversity, and a willingness to change [8]

Professional competence refers to the ability of school counsellors to effectively apply counselling skills, theories and principles in solving clients' problems. In contemporary counselling practice, the emphasis is on the imperative of counsellors been able to uncover the unconscious needs of the clients with the use of appropriate therapies that can support the attainment of specific outcome goal. Be this as it may, not all counsellors have the skills and competence to render effective therapeutics, leading to variations in the quality of service that clients can access from professional counsellors. Variations in counsellor competence can be attributed to the influence of individual differences. For instance, research by [9] confirmed that a counsellor must first be aware of him/herself if people are to understand the need of others and deliver satisfactory counselling services to clients. In view of these, the present study examined solution-focused psychotherapy and self-efficacy in enhancing professional competence of secondary school counsellors.

The basis for competent practice resides in the personal qualities, values and attitudes of the school counsellor. Personal and professional maturity is characterized by

- *An openness to continuous reflexive exploration of self and practice*

- *the willingness to commit to ongoing personal and professional development*
- *an openness to change, to alternative approaches*
- *an appreciation of difference and diversity*
- *the ability for independent judgment and responsibility for actions* [10]

The capacity to reflect on action, so as to engage in a process of continuous learning, is one of the defining characteristics of professional practice [11] ‘Thinking reflectively ...includes reflection in and on practice’ ‘an awareness of self in relationship’ which enables the guidance counsellor ‘to monitor their own reactions to the person and to use this information to build a more effective helping relationship’ [12]. In addition, an awareness of the personal, social and cultural contexts in which we live and work, and an understanding of how these contexts impact on the ways we interpret our world are an essential basis for reflexivity.

Solution-focused psychotherapy (SFP) is the therapeutic treatment designed to inculcate skills and strategies through which school counsellors could always remain focused in solving client’s problems by concentrating on way out. Solution-focused psychotherapy is a solution building approach to counselling which was first developed by [13]. The solution-focused psychotherapist assumes that change is constant and clients have their own resources to overcome difficulties [14]. Thus, the therapist collaborates and tailors the therapy to the individual clients in the room. Solution-focused psychotherapy has assisted professionals to improve in a variety of ways they help clients solve different problems including depression, and counselling competence [15].

SFP has been applied to counselling therapy in general and has been used with a wide array of presenting problems for counsellors including job performance [16] and, counselling competence [17]. Solution-based therapy has also been known to be effective with counsellors in therapeutic session [18]. Due to the scanty of literature on SEP, more empirical evidence might help establish the competence of SEP especially working with counsellors. [19] found that individuals and their perceptions about life are so diverse;

there is no single solution for such a problem. A typical session is filled with problem free talk, where change is regarded as inevitable through SEP. For example, exception talk allow clients to feel empowered towards gaining personal control. This study however examined the professional competence of school counsellors based on self-efficacy.

Self-efficacy is the judgment of school counsellors' capabilities to complete a designated task successfully in the school system. Counsellors with high academic efficacy often take on more challenging task, put in more effort, persist in the face of difficulty, and use strategies to make job productive [20]. When counsellors believe in themselves, people may also be more likely to develop enabling goals and accomplish the task while counsellor with low efficacy about their capabilities may avoid the learning task and opportunities to be satisfied [21] and [9]. Many researchers have suggested that self-efficacy is a good predictor of counselling professional competence [3]. Unless people believe that people can produce desired results by their actions, people have little incentive to act or to persevere in the face of difficulties. Empirical literature suggests that there is substantial interest in counselling efficacy within the field of counselling and psychotherapy. Counselling efficacy, as a construct, has found its way into the counselling research mainstream over the past several years [16].

Despite the effort of scholars and researchers in finding lasting solution to the problems of professional competence among school counsellors, little studies have concentrated on the use of solution- focused psychotherapy: however, despite several studies on professional competence among teachers and pre-service counsellors [21] and [19] little effort had been made on the secondary school counsellors. In order to fill the gaps in the previous study and add more to existing literatures, the present study sought to examine the extent to which solution-focused psychotherapy and self-efficacy are utilized in enhancing

professional competence of secondary school counsellors in Enugu Education Zone of Enugu State.

Statement of the Problem

In Nigeria, reports from the primary, secondary and tertiary educational level point out that the learners are indulging in luxury and pleasure seeking activities. Most youths have bad manners, contempt for authority, and disrespect for older people. It is not common to hear parents, teachers, and church leaders blaming each other, for failing to teach the young to be well behaved. Many parents have abandoned the training of their children to the school authorities especially to the school counsellors. The rationale for the introduction of guidance and counselling is well enscripted in the National Policy of Education (2013). One would have expected the nation to embrace and enthusiastically ensure that its contents are well implemented so that school counsellors can through the training prescribed become competent and well equipped to assist the government savage the youths of today for a better tomorrow.

However, the reverse is the case, its reception is with suspicious and a wait and see attitude. The services are still plagued by such problems as lack of adequate trained personnel, poor attitude of parents, principals, teachers, students, governments, which affects overall professional competence. Many individuals and governments have recognized the need for and important of guidance services in the nations educational system especially in view of recent poor socio-economic situations. What remains is to match this recognition with concrete steps and actions that would make guidance services both functional and central (effective) in the education system. In spite of the implementation of guidance and counselling in public schools in Nigeria, indisciplinary issues still exist. The question is: what is the contribution of solution-focused psychotherapy and self-efficacy in enhancing professional competence of secondary school

counsellors in Enugu Education Zone of Enugu State. As such, the study therefore examined the extent of solution-focused psychotherapy and self-efficacy in enhancing professional competence of secondary school counsellors in Enugu Education Zone of Enugu State.

Purpose of the Study

The major purpose of this study was to determine the extent of solution-focused psychotherapy and self-efficacy in enhancing professional competence of secondary school counsellors in Enugu Education Zone of Enugu State.

Specifically, the study sought to:

1. identify the basis for competent practice among school counsellors in enhancing professional competence of secondary school counsellors in Enugu Education Zone of Enugu State.
2. find out the extent to which School Counsellors utilize solution-focused psychotherapy and self-efficacy in enhancing professional competence of secondary school counsellors in Enugu Education Zone of Enugu State?

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study.

1. What is the basis for competent practice among school counsellors in enhancing professional competence of secondary school counsellors in Enugu Education Zone of Enugu State?
2. To what extent do school counsellors utilize solution-focused psychotherapy and self-efficacy in enhancing professional competence of secondary school counsellors in Enugu Education Zone of Enugu State?

METHODOLOGY

The researchers adopted a descriptive survey research design for this study. This design is best suited for this study because it permits the collection of original data and describes the condition as they exist in their natural setting. The population for the study consisted of the 59 secondary school counsellors currently serving in the 31 government owned secondary schools in Enugu Education Zone (Source: Education Services Department, Post Primary School Management Board (PPSMB), Enugu. 2015/2016 Session, March, 2016). The population is small and manageable so no sampling was done.

The instrument for data collection is a self-structured questionnaire developed by the researcher called Solution Focused Psychotherapy and Self-Efficacy Scale (SFPSE-S). It has 2 clusters with 10 items developed to assist the researcher provide clues that helped to raise the much needed data that were used to answer the two research questions that were formulated to guide the study. The response format of the instrument is a 4-point scale of very great extent, great extent, little extent and very little extent. Each response option has a numerical value assigned to it as follows: Very great extent (VGE)----4 points; Great extent (GE)-----3 points; Little Extent (LE)----2 points and Very little extent (VLE)—1 point for Cluster 1; Agree (SA-4), Agree (A-3), Disagree (D-2), Strongly Disagree (SD-1) for Cluster 2. An introductory letter was attached to the instrument stating the purpose of the study for the respondents easy of reference.

The instrument was validated by three experts- one in measurement and evaluation and the remaining two in guidance and counselling. Their constructive inputs were used to modify the instrument after which an instrument with 11 items emerged. The researchers used Cronbach Alpha reliability estimate to ascertain the internal consistency of the instrument. As a result of the fact that the instrument is in clusters, the researcher went ahead to calculate the coefficient of each cluster which stood at .83 for cluster 1, .67 for cluster 2

and .71 for cluster 3. That of the entire instrument was .74. This the researcher considered high enough and so decided to use the instrument to collect the much needed data for the study. The researchers distributed 59 copies of SFPSE-S to all the secondary school counsellors currently serving in the 31 government owned secondary schools in Enugu Education Zone with the assistance of three research assistants that were briefed in a one-day consultative meeting on the rationale for the study, how to distribute the instrument, the actual respondents and how to retrieve them .

Finally the researcher and the research assistants were able to retrieve 51 copies of SFPS signifying 86.44% return of the dully filled copies of the administer instrument. The two research questions formulated to guide the study were answered using mean, grand mean and standard deviation statistic. The mean rating of the numerical values assigned to the response options were added and divided by the number of the response options. This formed the basis for the cut-off point. Thus:

$$\frac{4+3+2+1}{4} = \frac{10}{4} = 2.50$$

Decision Rule-For the research questions: any item with a mean score of 2.50 and above were regarded as “great extent or Agree” while any item whose mean score is below 2.50 was interpreted to mean ‘little extent or disagree’.

Data Analysis and Results

The analyzed data were presented in Table 1-2 in accordance with the research questions that guided the study.

Research Question 1: What are the basis for competent practice among school counsellors in enhancing professional competence of secondary school counsellors in Enugu Education Zone of Enugu State?

Table 1: Mean (\bar{X}) Rating with Standard Deviation of the Basis of Competent Practice among School Counsellors in Enhancing Professional Competence of Secondary School Counsellors in Enugu Education Zone of Enugu State.

S/ N	Basis of Competent Practice	4 SA	3 A	2 D	1 SD	\bar{X}	SD	Decision
1.	Having personal qualities, values and attitudes of the school counsellor	23	17	9	2	3.20	0.87	Agree
2.	Counsellors having the willingness to commit themselves to professional development	21	19	9	2	3.16	0.86	Agree
3.	Attitudes of the school counsellor very disgusting	7	9	15	20	2.06	1.07	Disagree
4.	An openness to continuous reflexive exploration of self and practice	27	11	9	4	3.20	1.00	Agree
5.	Counsellors having an openness to continuous reflexive exploration of self and practice	21	12	11	7	2.92	1.09	Agree
6.	Counsellors having the ability for independent judgment and responsibility for actions	31	11	7	2	3.39	0.87	Agree
N = 51		Grand Mean				2.98		Agree

Data presented in Table 1 revealed that the respondents agreed with 5 of the items. Out of 6 identified basis for competent practice among school counsellors in enhancing professional competence of secondary school counsellors in Enugu Education Zone of Enugu State. The items they agreed with are 1, 2, 4, 5 and 6 with mean scores of 3.20, 3.16, 3.20, 2.92 and 3.39 respectively. They however disagreed with item 3 as their recorded

mean score is 2.06. The values of their standard deviation ranged from 0.87 to 1.09 which indicated that the respondents were not too far from the mean and from the opinion of one another in their responses, the items were valid. The grand mean score of 2.98 is above the 2.50 bench mark, indicating that the basis for competent practice among school counsellors in enhancing professional competence of secondary school counsellors in Enugu Education Zone of Enugu State are having personal qualities, values and attitudes of the school counsellor; counsellors having the willingness to commit themselves to professional development; an openness to continuous reflexive exploration of self and practice; counsellors having an openness to continuous reflexive exploration of self and practice; counsellors having the ability for independent judgment and responsibility for actions.

Research Question 2: To what extent do school counsellors utilize solution-focused psychotherapy and self-efficacy in enhancing their professional competence in Enugu Education Zone of Enugu State?

Table 3: Mean with Standard Deviation of the Extent to which School Counsellors utilize Solution-Focused Psychotherapy and Self-Efficacy in Enhancing Professional Competence in Enugu Education Zone of Enugu State

S/ N	School Counsellors utilize Solution-Focused Psychotherapy and Self-efficacy in Enhancing Professional Competence	4 VGE	3 GE	2 LE	1 VLE	\bar{X}	SD	Decision
7	SFP brings solution building approach to counselling sessions	19	17	12	3	3.02	0.93	GE
8	SFP helps professionals to improve in their depression, and counselling competence	33	9	5	4	3.39	0.96	GE
9	SFP and Self-efficacy help school counsellors to act or to persevere in the face of difficulties	23	17	10	1	3.22	0.83	GE
10	Counsellors with high academic efficacy often take on more challenging task & put in more effort	27	13	8	3	3.25	0.93	GE
11	Counsellor with low efficacy about their capabilities may avoid the learning task and opportunities to be satisfied	5	6	13	27	1.78	1.01	LE
N = 51		Grand Mean				2.93		GE

of the 5 items in Table 2 above, the respondents to a great extent agreed with 4 of the them (7, 8, 9 and 10) as their recorded mean scores (3.02, 3.39, 3.22 and 3.3.25 and 3.65) is above the cut-off point of 2.50. The respondents however disagreed to a little extent with the remaining 1 item (1.78) which is below the agreed bench mark. The standard deviation are small signifying homogeneity in the respondents for the items raised. The table also indicated that the respondents recorded a grand mean score of 2.93. Going by the criteria for the interpretation of the respondents data, the answer to research question 2 is that secondary school counsellors in Enugu Education Zone of Enugu State, Nigeria utilize solution-focused psychotherapy and self-efficacy in enhancing their professional competence to a great extent.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The result in the table1 showed that the basis for competent practice among school counsellors which enhances their professional competence in Enugu Education Zone of Enugu State, Nigeria are having personal qualities, values and attitudes of the school counsellor; counsellors having the willingness to commit to professional development; an openness to continuous reflexive exploration of self and practice; counsellors having an openness to continuous reflexive exploration of self and practice; counsellors having the ability for independent judgment and responsibility for actions. The findings is in consistent with the findings of [7] who remarked that counsellors with high academic efficacy often take on more challenging tasks, put in more, persist in the face of difficulty, and use strategies to make job their productive [7]. Many researchers have suggested that self-efficacy is a good predictor of counselling professional competence [11]. Unless people believe that people can produce desired results by their actions, people have little incentive to act or to be more likely to develop enabling goals and accomplish the task while counselor with low efficacy about their capabilities may avoid the learning task and opportunities to be satisfied [8].

The result in table 2 showed that counsellors in secondary schools in Enugu Education Zone of Enugu State, Nigeria utilize solution-focused psychotherapy and self-efficacy in enhancing their professional competence to a great extent. This is in line with the finding of [9] and Lee [10] who found that solution-focused psychotherapy help professionals to improve their competence in a variety of different ways that they handle problems like depression, and counselling. SFP has been applied to counselling therapy in general and has been used with a wide array of presenting problems for counsellors including job performance [17], counselling competence [18] and [7]. Solution-based therapy has been shown to be effective with counsellors in therapeutic session [19]. Due to the scanty of

literature on SFP, more empirical evidence might help establish the competence of SFP especially working with counselors [20] and [4] found that individual people and their perceptions about life are so diverse; there is no single solution for such a problem.

CONCLUSION

The need to evaluate the professional competence of school counsellors is of paramount importance in the practice of professional counselling. An appraisal of counselling competence is necessary to understand the counselling process and ascertain why and under what conditions counsellors are effective. It is believed that effective counselling is the degree to which a client is sensitive to the existence of behavioural problem; counselling is voluntary for the client and the counsellor meets the needs for the client. Base on the findings of this study, persistent poor professional competence of Nigerian counsellors are due to some factors should not continue indefinitely. There is hope that with the improvement of professional competence, the situation can be changed for the better. The study discovered that solution-focused and self-efficacy had significant influence on professional competence of school counsellor. As such, it is very crucial to improve these factors so as to eradicate the persistent occurrence of reports of poor professional competence not only in Enugu Education Zone but also in other Zones in Enugu State and Nigeria as a whole.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the findings of this study, it is recommended that:

1. The Post-Primary Schools Management Board (PPSMB) should organize seminars on the implications of solution-focused psychotherapy as effective interventions towards enhancing professional competence of secondary school counsellors.

2. Counsellor and other stakeholders in the school system are to be trained on how to improve on their self-efficacy. This will serve as collaborative efforts to assist in improving professional competence of school counsellors.
3. Counsellor and preservice counsellors should be encouraged and trained on the effective usage of solution-focused psychotherapy. This will make the counsellors adopt effective skills and principles in solving clients' problem and invariably enhance professional competence.

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