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TEACHERS' PERCEPTION OF NEEDS FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL COUNSELLING IN ILORIN METROPOLIS, NIGERIA

Ajiboye, S.K. (Ph.D.); Adebayo, D.O and Awoyemi, A.O.

Department of Counsellor Education, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria

Emails: skajiboye@yahoo.com; yomieva@yahoo.com; alfredawoyemi@yahoo.com

Abstract

The elementary school stage is the foundation for future academic, psychological, persona-social and career growth upon which the fulfillment of any child's aspiration is anchored. Unfortunately, many children at this level attend school as a routine without adequate guidance. This study therefore investigated perception of teachers in Ilorin metropolis on the needs for elementary school counselling service. Quantitative measure was adopted to gather the required information. A total of 200 respondents were purposively selected across the variables of years of teachers' teaching experience, educational qualification and gender. The study employed the use of a questionnaire titled "Teachers' Perception of Needs for Elementary School Counselling Questionnaire (TPNESCO)". The instrument had two sections A and B. Section A sought the demographic information, while section B elicited teachers' perception. Two research questions and three null hypotheses were answered and tested respectively. The results revealed that respondents have positive perception of the needs for elementary school counselling service. Also, there was similarity in the perception of teachers based on educational qualification and years of teaching experience, but differ on the basis of gender. It was recommended that, as a matter of policy, professional counsellors should be assigned to elementary schools. In addition, specialized training for counsellors on elementary school counselling is suggested.

Keywords: Perception, Elementary, School Counselling, Ilorin Metropolis.

Introduction

Counselling, the core of the school guidance programme, is predicated on the assumption that every individual, especially students in the school setting has had, are having and would have challenge that overwhelms their personal coping skills. Thus, such individual would need professional assistance in order to be able to function adequately in the society. Counselling is an interpersonal relationship between a counsellor and a counsellee with the aim of assisting the latter in self-understanding, decision-making and problem solving. It is also oriented towards facilitating effective learning skills, acceptable habits and appropriate behaviours in an individual (Idowu, 2014). According to Makinde (1985), counselling is an enlightened process whereby people help people by facilitating growth, development and positive change through an exercise of self understanding. In recognition of the important roles of counselors in the scheme of total development of students, the Federal Government, through the National Policy on Education, NPE (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2004) stated inter alia that:

In view of the apparent ignorance of many young people about career prospects, and in view of personality maladjustment among students, counsellors will be appointed in post-primary institution. (p. 43).

From the foregoing, it can be deduced that attention is focused on providing counselling services to post-primary school students, leaving the elementary school pupils out of the scheme. However, if the society is to have fully functioning adults, according to Durosaro (2004), special assistance (counselling) in fulfilling effective and cognitive needs must be provided through the schools for children and pre-adolescents in the elementary schools. The elementary school refers to the pre-secondary school stage in education with pupils mostly between ages 3 and 12. In some cases, children at age 3 start pre-primary education while they metamorphose into primary school stage. Thus, elementary school in the on-going discourse is synonymous to primary school stage in the Nigerian context. Hence, adequate understanding of the characteristics of elementary school pupils would better help to appreciate the needs for counselling service at the level.

The most favourable time for addressing school and social problems is during the early formative years. Formative years of life refer to a child's childhood years in which many character traits, attitudes and behaviour are formed. Durosaro (2004) assert that deviant behaviours in children could be tamed at these years of life. The formative years range from ages 2-10. As a matter of fact, it is believed that fish can only be bent when it is still very fresh, hence, the need for the introduction, supervision and evaluation of counselling services at the elementary school level. Myrick (1977) reviewed that about 50 percent of a child's intellectual development occurs between conception and age 4, 30 percent between age 4 and 8, and 20 percent from ages 13 to 17. This indicates that 80 percent of the child's intellectual development occurs during elementary school age. Other studies on child's development (Van Hoose 2000; Carlson, 2001) showed that children establish lifelong behavioural patterns during ages 6 through 10; the first four years of school, regarded as the elementary stage. It is perhaps for these reasons that the society needs the intervention of counselors in the elementary schools. In addition, the need for elementary school counselling becomes expedient considering the prisons, mental hospital, welfare lines, and employment offices which are inhabited by ex-elementary school children (Green 2012). Elementary school years set the tone for developing the knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary for children to become healthy, competent and confident learners. Through a comprehensive developmental school counseling programme, school counselors work as a team with the school staff, parents and the community to create a caring climate and atmosphere. By providing education, prevention, early identification and intervention, school counselor can help all children achieve academic success (Schmitt, 2013).

Despite the important role of elementary school counselling in developing total child and enhancing the effective achievement of education goals, it is still unfortunate that various groups of stakeholders in education industry have not appreciated the service. This manifests in different dimensions; the policy makers have not entrenched elementary school counselling service into the education blue print, school staff usually attempt to frustrate counselors for many reasons amongst which is unhealthy rivalry, and the fact that pupils are not adequately sensitized on the importance of counselling. Thus, the need to examine the perception of teachers on needs for elementary school counselling service.

Statement of the Problem

The importance of the counseling service to the total educational effort is frequently misunderstood in the elementary (primary) school. This misconception has resulted in the lack of support for the development of school counseling programmes at this level. However, the provision of a formalized structured programme to assist the primary school child to meet basic developmental needs cannot be deferred until the individual reaches secondary school, because the primary school child is at a crucial stage in his or her development. Musa (2012) found that

secondary school principals usually display a negative attitude toward counselling service in secondary schools in Kwara State. However, Schmit (2013) found that parents showed positive attitudes toward provision of elementary school counselling services in rural communities in Ohio. The present study investigated needs for elementary school counselling service as perceived by teachers in Ilorin metropolis, Nigeria.

Research Questions

1. What is the perception of teachers on the needs for elementary school counselling service?
2. What particular reason is rated highest as the need for elementary school counselling service?

Research Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference in the perception of teachers on needs for elementary school counselling services based on years of teaching experience.
2. There is no significant difference in the perception of teachers on needs for elementary school counselling service based on educational qualification.
3. There is no significant difference in the perception of respondents based on gender.

Methodology

The study used quantitative approach for gathering the required information. A questionnaire type of instrument was used and it is titled "Teachers' Perception of Needs for Elementary School Counselling Questionnaire (TPNESCQ)". The instrument had two sections, A and B. Section A sought the demographic information while Section B had 15 items on teachers' perception of the needs for elementary school counselling service. The instrument had a reliability coefficient of 0.82, which was established through test a re-test method. Purposive sampling technique was used to select 200 teachers that participated in the study; the respondents were primary school teachers only. The researchers directly administered the questionnaire on the respondents. Percentages, measures of central tendencies, t-test and analysis of variance (ANOVA) statistics were used to analyze the data. All hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Table 1

Distribution of respondents by gender, years of teaching experience and educational qualification

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	80	40
Female	120	60
Years of teaching experience		
1-10 years	98	49
11-20 years	74	37
Above 20 years	28	14
Educational Qualification		
Grade II/NCE	150	75
First Degree and above	50	25

The results on table 1 reveal that more females participated in the study than males. Those with 1-10 years of teaching experience were more than other groups, while those who possessed GII and NCE tripled those having degrees and above.

Table 2
Mean Scores and Rank Order of Items on Perception of Respondents on Needs for Elementary School Counselling Service.
Elementary school counselling service is needed in order to:

Item No.	Item	Mean Scores	Rank
4	compliment academic activities	3.12	1 st
5	improve pupils' performance in examinations	3.10	2 nd
6	help pupils develop positive attitude to schooling	3.09	3 rd
9	improve pupils' participation in class work	3.06	4 th
7	help pupils relate well with others	3.02	5 th
10	enhance creativity in pupils	3.01	6 th
11	help pupils overcome fear	2.97	7 th
8	help pupils understand their potential	2.94	8 th
1	assist teachers discover gifted pupils	2.93	9 th
3	help parents manage behavioural problems among pupils	2.91	10 th
2	help pupils develop positive self-concept	2.88	11 th
15	reduce truancy	2.85	12 th
13	overcome mass failure	2.81	13 th
12	expose pupils to early career orientation	2.76	14 th
14	help pupils develop adequate self control	2.72	15 th

The results on table 2 reveals that the perception of the respondents on need for elementary school counselling service is positive since all the items have mean scores above 2.50 which is the cut-off (decision) point for 4-point scale which the instrument represents. The highest rated item is to compliment academic activities.

Hypothesis One: There is no significant difference in the perception of teachers on needs for elementary school counselling service based on years of teaching experience.

Table 3
ANOVA of Perception of Respondents Based on Years of Teaching Experience

Source	df	SS	Mean Squares	Cal. F-ratio	Crit. F-ratio
Between groups	2	50.1375	25.06677	0.51	3.00
Within groups	197	10238.4015	52.0161		
Total	199	10288.5490			

P> 0.05 NS

The results in table 3 reveals that the hypothesis is accepted, thus, there is no significant difference in the perception of respondents based on years of teaching experience.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant difference in the perception of respondents based on educational qualification

Table 4
Analysis of t-test showing the mean score of respondents' perception of the needs for elementary school counseling service based on educational qualification

Educational Qualification	N	Mean	SD	df	Calculated t-value	Critical t-value
Grade II/NCE	150	67.56	7.47	198	0.23	1.96
First Degree and Above	50	67.30	9.36			

P> 0.05 NS

The result of the hypothesis 2 reveals that it was accepted. Thus, there is no significant difference in the perception of respondents on needs for elementary school counselling service based on educational qualification.

Hypothesis Three: There is no significant difference in the male and female perception of the needs for elementary school counselling.

Table 5
Analysis of t-test showing mean scores of respondents' perception of the needs for elementary school counselling service based on gender

Gender	N	Mean	SD	df	Calculated t-value	Critical t-value
Male	80	66.94	7.47			
Female	120	87.46	8.53	198	2.88	1.96

P < 0.05 Sig.

The results in table 5 revealed that the hypothesis was rejected, thus, there is significant difference in the perception of respondents on the basis of gender.

Discussion

The results in table 2 provide answer to research questions 1 and 2. Question 1 sought to establish the perception of respondents on the need for elementary school counselling service. The mean values of the items show that respondents expressed positive perception on the need for elementary school counselling service. The mean values of the items indicate that respondents expressed positive perception on the need for elementary school counselling service. This was not consistent with Musa's (2012) findings where the researcher established that principals have negative attitudes toward counselling programmes. The reason for the difference between the two studies could be because the respondents sampled in the previous study were different from those of the present work. The respondents also perceived that elementary school counselling service is needed because it compliments academic activities. Schmitt (2013) has earlier found similar result among rural teachers in Ohio.

Meanwhile, respondents were similar in their perceptions of the need for elementary school counselling service based on year of teaching experience. This is consistent with the earlier findings of Green (2012) whose study was also conducted among elementary school teachers in Indiana. Also, there was no significant difference in the perception of respondents based on educational qualification. The findings corroborate the earlier study by Musa (2012) who established that there was no significant difference in the attitude of principals towards counselling service based on teaching experience.

Hypothesis 3 was however rejected because there was significant difference in the perception of respondents on the needs for elementary school counselling based on gender though females were more positive. This disagrees with the findings of Ahmad (2007) whose work revealed no

significant difference among secondary school teachers. The reason for the disagreement could be because the earlier study focused on factors influencing needs for career counselling in secondary schools, while the present study focused on perception of elementary school teachers on the need for elementary school counselling services.

Conclusion

Since educational qualification does not significantly create parity in terms of job specification among teachers, it is always likely they express similar perception on issues that relate to their profession.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that:

- As a matter of policy, professional counsellors should be assigned to work in elementary schools to compliment the academic activities.
- Since teachers' perception of need for elementary school counselling service is positive, they would be encouraged to support such service in schools if available; and
- Male teachers should be sensitized to develop more positive perception on elementary school counselling service like their female counterparts.

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