



NIGHTINGALE PUBLICATIONS AND RESEARCH INTERNATIONAL

COUNSELLING SKILLS POSSESSED BY COUNSELLORS FOR IMPROVING STUDENTS' ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENTS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN ANAMBRA STATE

NNADI, GRACE CHINYERE (Ph. D)
AND UZOEKWE, HELEN E. (Ph. D)

*Department of Guidance And Counselling,
Faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe
University, Awka, Anambra State Pmb 5025*

Introduction

Secondary education is an important level of education that prepares a child for higher education. It empowers and inculcates into students rightly knowledge, literary and other basic skills that will enable them contribute towards the socio-economic development of the society. Secondary education which is meant to prepare the beneficiaries towards useful living within the society has certain goals and objectives. According to the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2013), secondary education includes both junior secondary and senior or post-basic education in which children receive after a successful completion of primary or basic education. The objectives

Abstract

School guidance counsellors' play important roles in students' learning and their contributions in using varieties of the counselling skills would eventually lead to students' academic achievement. However, the high rate and increase of poor students' academic performances which leads to low academic achievements observed in Anambra secondary schools has been the reason for this present study. It evident in related literature and other sources that guidance counselling services which involves counsellors utilizing their counselling skills could be very much effective in the achievement of students' academic excellence, performances and achievements. This study therefore examined counselling skills possessed by counsellors for improving students' academic achievements in secondary

Schools in Anambra State. Two research questions guided the study. A descriptive survey research design was employed in the study. The population for this study constituted 34,619 senior secondary school students in 258 public secondary schools within the six (6) education zones in Anambra State. The sample for the study consisted of 692 senior secondary school students drawn from 129 secondary schools within the 6 education zones in Anambra State using both the probability and non-probability sampling techniques constituting the stratified random sampling and systematic sampling techniques respectively. The samples drawn represented 50% of the public secondary schools and 2% of the students' population selected for the study. A 36-item questionnaire developed by the researcher and titled: "Counsellors' Counselling Skills Questionnaire (CCSQ)" as rated by the students served as the instrument for data collection. The instrument was validated by two experts from Guidance and Counselling Department, and one Measurement and Evaluation expert from Educational Foundations Department, Faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State. Reliability of the instrument was established through a pilot test conducted once on a single administration of the research instrument which was distributed on a sample of 30 students from three public secondary schools in Enugu State. Data were analyzed using mean scores bench marked on a midpoint of 2.50 and standard deviation. Findings of the study revealed among others, the counselling skills possessed by counsellors for improving students' academic achievements and which were only the listening skills, questioning skills and skill of allowing silence. It was further revealed through the findings that majority of the counsellors did not possess the counselling skills investigated. From these findings, recommendations were made. Among these recommendations include that: Anambra State Post Primary Schools Service Commission (PPSSC) in collaboration with the principals should utilize the necessary means or strategies through coordination of various staff development programmes and use of effective reward systems, in order to equip school counsellors with the requisite counselling skills for improvement of students' academic achievements. However, they should encourage counsellors to frequently participate in in-service training and retraining programmes that will improve their professional counselling skills for improving students' academic achievements.

Keywords: *Guidance, Counselling, Skills, Possessed, Counsellors, Improving, Students, Academic, Achievements, Secondary Schools*

Of secondary education as highlighted by the FRN (2013: 34) are to offer holders of primary and basic education certificate opportunity for higher education; offer diversified curriculum to cater for the differences in talents, disposition, opportunities and future roles; provide trained manpower in the applied sciences, technology and commerce at sub-professional grades; provide entrepreneurial, technical and vocational job specific skills for self-reliance, and for agricultural, industrial, commercial and economic development; develop and promote Nigerian languages, art and culture in the context of world's cultural heritage; inspire students with a desire for self-improvement and achievement of excellence; foster patriotism, national unity and security education with emphasis on the common ties in spite of our diversity; develop patriotic young people who are equipped to also contribute to social development and the performance of their civic responsibilities; and raise morally upright and well-adjusted individuals who can think independently and rationally, respect the views and feelings of others and appreciate the dignity of labour.

Achievements of the above objectives cannot be effectively attained if secondary schools are not functional enough to render certain essential services like guidance and counselling services that will promote students' academic performances leading to improved academic achievements. In the secondary schools including those in Anambra State, students undergo series of academic or curricular programmes together with assessments at every stage which determines their academic achievements. Without a student putting much efforts in academic activities and studies this will at the end affect negatively their academic achievements. Students' academic achievements refers to the actualization of the educational standard and appropriate goals as the major objective functions of school in the society (Audu, 2015; Ncharam, 2005). Academic achievement can be defined as the level of actual accomplishment or proficiency one has achieved in an academic area (Audu, 2015). Academic achievement is the outcome of education, the extent to which a student, teacher or institution has achieved their educational goals and it is commonly measured by examinations or continuous assessment (Bossaert, Doumen, Buyse & Verschueren, 2011).

Besides, Njoku (2007) defines achievement as the ability of an individual to accomplish his set goal. Achievement in the school system involves the ability of students to realize their academic dreams in the school. Academic achievement is synonymous with educational goal attainment, and has strong correlation with motivation. For quite some time now, the academic achievement of secondary school students has been of concern to parents, guardians, students and even the wider society, and it is one of the most important goals of the educational process. The success or failure of the students' achievement depends on a number of factors such as parental background, study habits and relationship with peers, performances, among others. A good guidance counsellor with adequate counselling skills will not only motivate the child, but also enhance his scholastic achievement and hence a successful transition to the next level of education (Audu, 2015). It is through the performances of students that one seems to determine the students' abilities, successes, failures and academic achievements in school. Audu (2015) maintained that academic achievement is an important parameter in measuring students learning outcome in various school discipline and a key mechanism through which in-school adolescents learn about their talents, abilities, dispositions and competencies which are important parts of developing career aspirations. So the issues surrounding students' academic achievements is one to be taken very seriously because such determines the future potentials and career of students.

Maduekwe (2002) opined that what Nigeria needs is to grow its young people in democracy in peace, wisdom and sincerity of purpose that comes from within all Nigerians. In fact, peace, wisdom and sincerity of purpose can only come through academic experiences, programmes, learning and studies as offered in the secondary school system in which provision of guidance and counselling services through effective counsellors' skills in the school will help students' to successfully achieve this course. Again, people after developing a wider horizon from their academic studies at the secondary school level will develop and inculcate potentials and competences which is capable of making them well-adjusted individuals who are patriotic, independent, rational and well-behaved in the society capable of contributing towards national development. In support of the above statement, Mbang (2002) attested that it is only education which inculcates into its recipients basic and rightful skills and knowledge that can gradually erase intolerance,

indiscipline and other violent acts or deviant behaviour, that create fear among Nigerians. Instead of people taking the law into their hands, it will be a matter of seeking redress in law courts for the purpose of establishing their cases. This understanding will create peace and stability making room for growth and development of the nation. Lunenburg (2010) observed that one of the functions of education which includes those of guidance and counselling is to provide opportunities for each student to reach his full potential in the areas of educational, vocational, personal and emotional development; and guidance and counselling services orchestrated by counsellors' skills is an integral part of education which is centered directly on this function. Guidance and counseling services therefore, prepare students to assume increasing responsibility for their decisions and grow in their ability to understand and accept the results of their choices. The ability of students to make intelligent choices is not innate but, like other abilities, must be developed through education. Secondary education however, is an essential ingredient towards developing students' abilities for nation-building, national reconstruction, social change (FRN, 2013), national and sustainable development which incorporates the economic, social, political, environmental religious/spiritual and cultural aspects of life. The school owes the students the responsibility of providing specialized assistance through the school counselling programme for career decision making. Therefore, the need for the products of secondary schools to be effectively and efficiently treated to achieve the national goals likewise, the noble objectives of their founding fathers (Mbang, 2002). Additionally, guidance and counselling as an essential educational service as indicated by the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2013) is deemed by the national policy as a catalyst for resolving student related concerns. Guidance and counselling as defined by Kituyi (2014) and Lunenburg (2010) is a programme that assists in understanding the biological, sociological, philosophical and psychological needs of students in particular being in their adolescent, stage congregating in the secondary schools. It is an interactive process, co-joining the counsellor who is trained and educated to give assistance to the counsellee. The goal of guidance and counselling intervention is to help the one being guided and counselled to learn to deal more effectively with him/herself on the reality of his/her environment. Guidance and counselling offers several programmes to students such as academic or educational guidance and counselling, personal

or social guidance and counselling, vocational or career guidance and counselling, referral counselling, among others, through the assistance or guidance of a professional counsellor, in order to solve various problems and challenges in the school which might have negative effect on students' academic achievements. Any guidance and counselling activity or programme aims at creating a positive attitude among learners towards their academic achievements under the guidance of a school counsellor. Secondary school counsellors according to Bolu-Steve and Oredugba (2017) is defined as teachers who tries to use their professional training, skills, expertise and experience to help the client to overcome an area of conflict or block which hitherto has hindered the inter and intra-personal relationships growth and development.

The counsellor is strategically placed in secondary schools in order to assist the student to develop ethical standards for educational pursuit. They help students to obtain holistic educational development. The counsellor can assist in-school adolescents to handle behavioural, educational and psychological problems. Alabi (2006) noted that this process creates a change in personality organization and structure which are relatively permanent. Hill (2014) says a counsellor is a trained individual who is able to use a different range of counselling approaches with their clients and who are bound by a code of ethics and practices. A counsellor will demonstrate unconditional acceptance, genuineness and empathy and will try to understand things from the client's perspective. A secondary school counsellor as describe within the context of this present study is a professional teacher that assists and guides students through the guidance and counselling process, service or programmes, on how to resolve their academic problems for higher academic achievements. Such an individual must have possess certain skills and attributes capable of helping students to pull through their academics for high achievements just as pointed out by Lunenburg (2010). Lunenburg (2010) further attested that the counsellor's role is to assist individuals or students to develop the abilities and potentials to understand themselves, to solve their own academic problems, and to make appropriate adjustments to their environment necessary for improved academic achievements. Secondary school guidance counsellors therefore, provide counselling programmes in three domains of: academic, career and personal/social. Their services and skills help students resolve emotional, social or behavioural problems and

help them develop a clearer focus or sense of direction. For example, if a student's behaviour is interfering with his or her achievement, the school counsellor may observe that student in a class, provide consultation to teachers and other stakeholders to develop (with the student) a plan to address the behavioural issue(s), and then collaborate to implement and evaluate the plan. They also provide consultation services to family members such as college access, career development, parenting skills, study skills, child and adolescent development, and help with school-home transitions (Lunenburg, 2010). School counsellor interventions for all students as further stated by (Lunenburg, 2010) include annual academic/ career and leading classroom developmental lessons on academic, career/college, and personal/social topics. The topics of character education, diversity and multiculturalism (Portman, 2009), and school safety are important areas of focus for school counselors. Professional school guidance counselors are expected by the national policy to provide a handful of broad range of guidance and counselling services in schools using different skills under the direction of their professional ethics. Students of especially secondary school age, who are mostly in the age range of pre- and post-adolescence period, are today living in challenging, exciting and demanding times with an increasingly diverse society, evolving technologies and expanding opportunities in a competitive global economy. As they transition from childhood through adolescence and to adulthood, secondary school students are faced with multifaceted challenges impacting academic achievements and readiness for postsecondary education success. Students' in this transition also undergo a lot of physical, social, psychological and emotional problems or challenges which requires proper guidance so that they do not derail in life. It is only proper implementation of the provisions of the guidance and counselling coupled with the assistance of a professional guidance counsellor's skills that can adequately address students' concern and ensure success at this level of education. A skill according to Skill Scan (2012), is simply an ability to perform an activity in a competent manner.

Counselling skills as defined within the context of this present study are attributes, qualities or characteristics possessed by the school counsellor in order to discharge the guidance and counselling services or duties in an efficient and effective manner so as to accomplish educational goals and objectives. Such skills like empathy, confidentiality, open-mindedness,

relationship building, tactfulness, good sense of humor, effective listener, inventive, creativity, friendliness, objectivity, tolerant and patience, understanding students' aspiration, sincerity, fairness, sympathetic attitude, probing, questioning, self-disclosure, silence, among others, according to Adedipe (1997) and Okumu (2007), are very essential for counsellors to assist students attain high academic achievements in school. Onyiliofor (2011) identified the following skills that will help clients understand and solve their daily problems. These skills include: listening, responding, empathizing, probing, questioning, prodding, interpretation, reflection, confronting, restatement, silence, immediacy, encouraging, self-disclosing, summarizing, confidentiality and so on. For Hills (2014), school guidance counsellors are supposed to utilize various counselling skills such as effective communication to listen clients, paraphrasing, focusing, tentative interpretation of other's feelings, desires or meanings, use of effective questioning, summarizing, giving feedback, supporting and allowing silence which gives clients opportunity to think, when addressing a client. Hills further added that a counsellor's ability to listen to a client enables such individual to explore his/her difficulties by focusing on his/her feelings, experiences or behaviours. This will help the individual see things from a different view point and enable the individual or client to express his/her feelings. This will then help the individual to facilitate positive change in his life. Counsellors are supposed to be non-judgemental and will not advise a client or tell such client or individual on how he/she should act. This enables the individual to be his true self and to set his own agenda. Trust between a counsellor and client is paramount. Counselling provides confidently and a safe space for client to explore his issues. Counsellors will build a good rapport with their client but not to an extent that they would allow themselves to become emotionally involved. Counsellors need to be empathetic also and able to see things from their client point of view. Empathy can help the client to be felt held, understood and respected. This allows the counsellor to support the client with any of the issues that he/she brings up and help the individual find his or her own solutions to the problems. Vacc and Loesch cited in Cheruiyot and Orodho (2015) suggested consideration of personality skills when appointing a counsellor. This was because the personality of a counsellor affected his or her behaviour when handling the counselee. The researchers suggested that counsellors working

with clients need to possess personality traits that include genuineness, positive skepticism, trust, courage, security and empathy. Counsellors however, as previously mentioned should possess certain professional skills in order to deem it fit to address students' academic problems or challenges for improving higher academic achievements. Without the counsellor's skills, it will be difficult for such a person to address students' problems. This is why secondary school administrators are advised to make use of professional counsellors not just any subject teacher.

Njoku (2007) asserted that without the school counsellors' intervention and skills, the good work of subject teachers and school administrators may become compromised and ineffective. The poor and unimpressive performance of Nigerian secondary school students is an evidence that professional counselling is lacking in most secondary schools which is assumed to be caused by poor counselling skills of school guidance counsellors to render efficient and quality guidance and counselling services. The quality of education more so, is reflected through students' academic achievement resulting from the student's performance at various levels, which is a function of behaviour and commitment in their study habits and attitude. Thus, to enhance the quality of education, it is essential to determine counselling skills possessed by counsellors for improving students' academic achievements. This calls for secondary schools to arrange or organize for effective guiding and counselling services through the improvement of counsellors' skills. Previous studies like those of Adedipe (1997), Afullo (2005) cited in Cheruiyot and Orodho (2015), Bolu-Steve and Oredugba (2017), Cheruiyot and Orodho (2015), Okumu (2007), Onyiliofor (2011) and others have been conducted in the areas of guidance and counselling and counselling skills but each of these studies have their mix which has deemed it necessary for the present study. The situation with poor guidance and counselling services coupled with the increase in reported caused of secondary school students indiscipline, violent actions and deviant behaviours have motivated the researcher to conduct the present study. The present study however sought to investigate and determine counselling skills possessed by counsellors for improving students' academic achievements in secondary schools in Anambra State. It is however essential to sought opinions of senior students who are also recipients of the guidance and counselling services in the secondary schools in Anambra State in order to

determine the various counselling skills employed by counsellors for improving their academic achievements and to also sought their opinions on the areas where counsellors could utilize the various counselling skills to address students' learning needs for improving their academic achievements in secondary schools in Anambra State.

Statement of the Problem

School counsellors play important roles in students' learning. They are needed in order to help students for optimum academic achievements and likewise adequate adjustment in the varied life situations. Counsellors address both academic and developmental needs of all students in the school as such they need to possess certain counselling skills in order to render effective guidance and counseling services that will lead to improving academic achievements in schools. Given the important roles of counsellors in the school, yet it is worrisome that many counsellors having undergone professional through training are yet to utilize effective skills in counselling. Observations from most of the secondary schools in Anambra State show that recently the rate of students' indiscipline, deviant behaviour and violent acts in the secondary schools is high. This is evident in the reported cases of students' involvement in social vices such as gangsterism, bullying, internal and external examination malpractices, insulting teachers, disobedience, theft, among others. All these issues which have created a gap which needs to be filled by the present study and equally raised concern for the researcher to determine whether counsellors actually possess the rightfully skills that will enable them control the maladjustments found among secondary schools' youth which could be channeled towards their academic achievements. Therefore, the need to examine the counselling skills possessed by counsellors for improving students' academic achievements in secondary schools in Anambra State, has become the problem of the study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine counselling skills possessed by counsellors for improving students' academic achievements in secondary schools in Anambra State. Specifically, the study aimed at finding out the following:

1. To determine counselling skills possessed by counsellors for improving students' academic achievements in secondary schools in Anambra State.
2. To examine the aspects where counsellors could utilize the various counselling skills in addressing students' learning needs for improving their academic achievements in secondary schools in Anambra State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the counselling skills possessed by counsellors' for improving students' academic achievements in secondary schools in Anambra State?
2. What are the aspects where counsellors could utilize the various counselling skills in addressing students' learning needs for improving their academic achievements in secondary schools in Anambra State?

Methods

A descriptive survey research design was employed in the study. This design was used to collect data from a sample of senior secondary school (SSS) students in Anambra State in order to share their opinions concerning the counselling skills possessed by counsellors for improving students' academic achievements in secondary schools in Anambra State. This design equally involved conducting a field investigation using a questionnaire to collect data from the respondents (SSS students) which were analyzed using a statistical tool and thereafter form generalization, inferences and conclusion from the results of the findings. According to Akilaiya, Opute-Imala and Ezoem (2002), the descriptive survey design is used in observing what is happening to sample subjects or variables in order to generate necessary primary data for the study. The design according to Nworgu (2015), enable the researcher to collect data from a sample of a given population, and likewise describe in a systematic manner the characteristics, facts and features about that given population. This design is therefore seen suitable for the present study since it has to do with facts concerning a given population or elements. The population for this study constituted 34,619 senior secondary school students in 258 public secondary schools within the six (6) education zones in Anambra State (Source: Research, Planning and Statistics Department,

Anambra State Ministry of Education, 2019). Justification for choosing only students from the senior secondary schools is as a result that being one of the important beneficiaries and recipients who interact with the counsellors through the various counselling programmes or services in the secondary schools; they are in better position to describe such skills possessed by counsellors during their counselling services. Besides, since the study focused on counsellors' skills, the students are in better position to rate the counsellors' activities in their various schools.

The sample for the study consisted of 692 senior secondary school students drawn from 129 secondary schools within the 6 education zones in Anambra State using both the probability and non-probability sampling techniques constituting the stratified random sampling and systematic sampling techniques respectively. The samples drawn represented 50% of the public secondary schools and 2% of the students' population selected for the study. In using the probability to do the selection, the stratified random sampling technique was applied and used to select only the secondary schools. Here, the 258 public secondary schools were first stratified according to the 6 education zones and school sample drawn at 50% (percent). In selecting sample from the students' population, the non-probability sampling applying the systematic sampling technique was employed. The method involved drawing every 50th position of students from the entire population. This sample also represented 2% of the senior secondary school students' population in the entire public secondary schools in Anambra State. Justification for choosing/selecting this sample is in line with Nworgu (2015) who identified that for some studies the group of items to which the study relates (that is, the population) may be small enough to warrant the inclusion of all of them or too large enough population which cannot be studied. In such cases, selection has to be done whereby a portion of the population is to be studied in order to make inferences or generalization about the population. This is however the situation of the present study which has warranted sample to be drawn. A 36-item questionnaire developed by the researcher and titled: "Counsellors' Counselling Skills Questionnaire (CCSQ)" as rated by the students served as the instrument for data collection. Construction of the questionnaire was guided by the purpose of the study and research questions. The items were organized into two clusters and structured on a 4-point scale weighted as follows: Strongly Agree (SA) - 4, Agree (A) - 3, Disagree (D) - 2,

Strongly Disagree (SD) - 1 in order to answer the research questions. The instrument was validated by two experts from Guidance and Counselling Department, and one Measurement and Evaluation expert from Educational Foundations Department, Faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State. The experts determined the face and content validity of the questionnaire in terms of items clarity, language and sentence construction. Corrections were made on few items which were equally incorporated before the final printing of the questionnaire for distribution. Reliability of the instrument was established through a pilot test conducted once on a single administration of the research instrument which was distributed on a sample of 30 students from three public secondary schools in Enugu State. According to Akilaiya, Opute-Imala and Ezoem (2002), Nworgu (2015) and Nzeneri (2010), this method involves a pilot-testing of the questionnaire carried out in some sample areas, whose scores and results are thereafter measured to show the degree to which the tests are equivalent, consistent and reliable. In this essence, after the pilot-test, scores were collated and measured using a statistical method. The reason for using Enugu State for pilot-test was to avoid bias, a situation whereby the true respondents of the study might have previous knowledge about the study, so this necessitated the use of a different area for the pilot-test.

Information retrieved from the students were collated and measured using Cronbach Alpha statistics which gave internal consistency reliability value of 0.84 and 0.79 for the two clusters, with an overall internal consistency of 0.82, showing that the questionnaire was reliable to collect the necessary data for the study. Nworgu (2015) identified that the Cronbach alpha statistical method refers to the degree of consistency with which the item of an instrument measures a given trait and provides a measure of how homogeneous or otherwise the items are. This statistical method is most appropriate for instruments arranged into clusters, where scores for the various items will be added to produce a single score. Information was gathered from the respondents (SSS students) through a face to face, direct and personal contact. An on-the-spot method was also adopted by the researcher in distributing copies of the questionnaire to ensure maximum recovery of the questionnaire administered. Copies of the questionnaire were administered to students by the researcher with the help of six research assistants. These research assistants were persons that received instructions

on how to administer the questionnaire to the respondents. The exercise of distributing copies of the questionnaire took a period of three weeks of completion. This enabled both the researcher and the research assistants to get the respondents at their different locations and likewise waited for them to fill the questionnaire right there on the spot. A total of 692 copies of questionnaires were printed and distributed. All copies of the questionnaire distributed to the respondents were retrieved and recovered back by the researcher and research assistants. The rate of return was 100%. Data were analyzed using mean scores bench marked on a midpoint of 2.50 and standard deviation. The decision rule for the research questions was based on the fact that only mean scores of the respondents' statements which rated 2.50 and above were regarded as an indication of Strongly Agree and Agree, and therefore, accepted. While mean scores of the respondents' statements which rated below 2.50 was regarded as an indication of Disagree and Strongly Disagree and therefore not accepted.

Results

Research Question 1: What are the counselling skills possessed by counsellors' for improving students' academic achievements in secondary schools in Anambra State?

Table 1: Mean Scores Rating and SD of Respondents on Counselling Skills Possessed by Counsellors for Improving Students' Academic Achievements in Secondary Schools in Anambra State

N = 692 SSS students

S/N	Please showcase your agreement with the following counselling skills exhibited by the school counsellor during guidance and counselling in your school. The school guidance counsellor during counselling:	SA	A	D	SD	X	SD	Decision
1.	is always very patient to listens attentively to students problems during counselling sessions (listening skill)	188	255	138	111	2.75	1.03	Agree

2.	uses both verbal or non-verbal communication such as facial expressions, warm gestures, making encouraging sounds, affirmative head nodding when addressing students problems (communication skill)	112	138	269	173	2.27	1.01	Disagree
3.	encourages students to focus on the issues or problems they are talking about rather than wander of topic (focusing skill)	119	117	222	234	2.17	1.08	Disagree
4.	takes time to reflect on students' problems heard as a way of validating their words, emotions or feelings without hurrying to draw up conclusions (reflecting skill)	176	128	234	154	2.47	1.10	Disagree
5.	make out time to analyze or interpret meaning of students' behaviours, feelings, desires and actions which affects their academic achievements in a given situation without been judgemental (interpretation skill)	101	139	284	168	2.25	0.98	Disagree
6.	is very efficient in probing students' about their academic challenges by asking questions without drawing into conclusion or intimidating students (questioning skill)	196	278	118	100	2.82	1.00	Agree
7.	sees things from students point of view in order to assist draw their attention to bring clarifications on any academic experience, problem, challenge or feeling that will affect their academic achievement (empathetic skill/empathy)	157	122	256	157	2.40	1.07	Disagree
8.	shows warmth and caring attitude in his/her own individual way when solving students' academic challenges (supporting skill)	123	153	215	201	2.29	1.07	Disagree

9.	gives students time to think, express themselves as well as talk about (skill of allowing silence)	199	237	153	103	2.77	1.02	Agree
10.	shares perceptions of the student's ideas or feelings (giving feedback)	168	142	203	179	2.43	1.12	Disagree
11.	creates ample opportunity to bring together in some way the feelings and experiences of the student talking (summarizing/paraphrasing skill)	122	138	267	165	2.31	1.02	Disagree
12.	is trusting and tactful in keeping confidential matters discussed during the counselling sessions with students without exposing it to other teachers in school (skill of confidentiality)	128	144	258	162	2.34	1.03	Disagree
13.	is very observant in taking note of students' general anxiety as a way to encourage students' to personally solve their problems (skill of observation)	144	166	199	183	2.39	1.09	Disagree
14.	builds friendly rapport with students in order to solve their problems (relationship or rapport building)	182	113	238	159	2.46	1.11	Disagree
15.	is open-minded to objectively handle students' academic problems (objectivity/open-mindedness)	154	136	188	214	2.33	1.13	Disagree
16.	shares his/her personal information with the students which is beneficial to the therapeutic process during counselling which might also be useful to relate better with students (self-disclosure)	133	140	209	210	2.28	1.09	Disagree
17.	invents lots of creativity which enables students to see a brighter side of tackling or providing solutions to their problems or challenges (creativity)	158	134	223	177	2.39	1.10	Disagree
Overall Mean & SD =						2.42	1.08	Disagree

Analysis of data in above Table 1 from the respondents' (that is, students) responses shows that only items 1, 6 and 9 were rated above 2.50 by students, therefore, agreeing with these statements. All other items from 2 to 5, items 7 to 8 and items 10 to 17 were rated below 2.50 by the students, therefore, disagreeing with these statements. The overall mean score of 2.42 with standard deviation (SD) of 1.08 indicated that there were close responses in the mean scores of the students which did not vary to show differences or variability in the scores. The result further showcased that the school counsellors did not possess sufficient counselling skills requisite for improving students' academic achievements in secondary schools in Anambra State.

Research Question 2: What are the aspects where counsellors could utilize the various counselling skills in addressing students' learning needs for improving their academic achievements in secondary schools in Anambra State?

Table 2: Mean Scores Rating and SD of Respondents on the Aspects where Counsellors Could Utilize the various Counselling Skills in Addressing Students' Learning Needs for Improving Students' Academic Achievements in Secondary Schools in Anambra State

N = 692 SSS students

S/N	Please showcase your agreement on the aspects where counsellors could utilize the various counselling skills in addressing students' learning needs for improving students' academic achievements.	SA	A	D	SD	X	SD	Decision
The school guidance counsellors during counselling could utilize their various skills in addressing the following aspects of students' learning needs:								
18.	poor study or reading habits of students coupled with laziness in studying	188	267	128	109	2.77	1.02	Agree
19.	matters related to students' absenteeism or poor attendance to classes affecting students' academic achievements	212	239	100	141	2.75	1.10	Agree

20.	students' dissatisfaction or low interest in a particular subject impacting negatively on their academic achievements	240	277	117	58	3.01	0.92	Agree
21.	students' lack of concentration towards their academic pursuit	201	246	129	116	2.77	1.05	Agree
22.	lack of ability to cope with academic task	222	244	105	121	2.82	1.07	Agree
23.	students' examination phobia	219	211	142	120	2.76	1.08	Agree
24.	issues concerning students' examination misconducts	198	263	132	99	2.81	1.01	Agree
25.	lack of ability to handle assignments	237	255	94	106	2.90	1.04	Agree
26.	emotional instability affecting academic work	224	293	112	63	2.98	0.92	Agree
27.	lack of ability to manage time in academics	184	233	142	133	2.68	1.07	Agree
28.	lack of motivation to learn	179	249	130	134	2.68	1.06	Agree
29.	behavioural problems which have negative impact on students' learning	215	253	109	115	2.82	1.05	Agree
30.	poor communication with subject teachers	194	233	163	102	2.75	1.02	Agree
31.	students inadequate knowledge and skills in some subject areas	213	289	102	88	2.91	0.98	Agree
32.	in aspect of low academic inspiration	192	241	127	132	2.71	1.07	Agree
33.	poor ability to make rightful career choices	208	288	103	93	2.88	0.99	Agree
34.	inability to employ different learning strategies for academic successes	213	238	116	125	2.78	1.07	Agree
35.	areas relating to physical, social or mental health challenges affecting students' learning	201	251	139	101	2.80	1.02	Agree
36.	aspects connected to students' difficulties in creating new ideas or innovations necessary for successful learning	207	240	121	124	2.77	1.07	Agree
Overall Mean & SD =						2.81	1.04	Agree

Analysis of data in above Table 2 from the respondents' (that is, students) responses shows that all the items from 18 to 36 were rated above 2.50 by students, therefore, agreeing with the statements. None of the items were rated below 2.50 by the students, in order to disagree with any of the

statements. The overall mean score of 2.81 with standard deviation (SD) of 1.04 indicated that there were close responses in the mean scores of the students which did not vary to show differences or variability in the scores. The result further showcased aspects where counsellors could utilize the various counselling skills in addressing students' learning needs for improving students' academic achievements in secondary schools in Anambra State.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study revealed that the school counsellors did not possess sufficient counselling skills requisite for improving students' academic achievements in secondary schools in Anambra State. The finding indicated that the counselling skills possessed by counsellors for improving students' academic achievements were only the listening skills, questioning skills and skill of allowing silence. The finding equally indicated that the counsellors did not possess counselling skills which could enable them during counselling sessions to: use both verbal or non-verbal communication such as facial expressions, warm gestures, making encouraging sounds, affirmative head nodding when addressing students' problems (that is, communication skill), encourage students to focus on the issues or problems they are talking about rather than wander of topic (that is, focusing skill), take time to reflect on students' problems heard as a way of validating their words, emotions or feelings without hurrying to draw up conclusions (reflecting skill), make out time to analyze or interpret meaning of students' behaviours, feelings, desires and actions which affects their academic achievements in a given situation without been judgemental (interpretation skill), see things from students point of view in order to assist draw their attention to bring clarifications on any academic experience, problem, challenge or feeling that will affect their academic achievement (empathetic skill/empathy), show warmth and caring attitude in his/her own individual way when solving students' academic challenges (supporting skill), share perceptions of the student's ideas or feelings (giving feedback), create ample opportunity to bring together in some way the feelings and experiences of the student talking (summarizing/paraphrasing skill), become trusted and tactful in keeping confidential matters discussed during the counselling sessions with students without exposing it to other teachers in school (skill of confidentiality), be

very observant in taking note of students' general anxiety as a way to encourage students' to personally solve their problems (skill of observation), build friendly rapport with students in order to solve their problems (relationship or rapport building), become very open-minded to objectively handle students' academic problems (objectivity/open-mindedness), share his/her personal information with the students which is beneficial to the therapeutic process during counselling which might also be useful to relate better with students (self-disclosure), and likewise, invent lots of creativity which enables students to see a brighter side of tackling or providing solutions to their problems or challenges (creativity).

This finding agrees and corroborates with Afullo's study in 2005 cited by Cheruiyot and Orodho (2015) including those studies of Bolu-Steve and Oredugba (2017), Cheruiyot and Orodho (2015), Okumu (2007) and Onyiliofor (2011) which found out that classroom teachers used as counsellors in the schools lacked sufficient counselling skills to effectively manage students' discipline. Without sufficient counselling skills it will be difficult to achieve the goals or objectives of guidance and counselling services in the secondary schools. This finding does not corroborate with those of Hills (2014) study which found out that school guidance counsellors are supposed to utilize various counselling skills such as effective communication to listen clients, paraphrasing, focusing, tentative interpretation of other's feelings, desires or meanings, use of effective questioning, summarizing, giving feedback, supporting and allowing silence which gives clients opportunity to think, when addressing a client. Hills further added that a counsellor's ability to listen to a client enables such individual to explore his/her difficulties by focusing on his/her feelings, experiences or behaviours. This will help the individual see things from a different view point and enable the individual or client to express his/her feelings. This will then help the individual to facilitate positive change in his life. Counsellors are supposed to be non-judgemental and will not advise a client or tell such client or individual on how he/she should act. This enables the individual to be his true self and to set his own agenda. Trust between a counsellor and client is paramount. Counselling provides confidently and a safe space for client to explore his issues. Counsellors will build a good rapport with their client but not to an extent that they would allow themselves to become emotionally involved. Counsellors need to be

empathetic also and able to see things from their client point of view. Empathy can help the client to be felt held, understood and respected. This allows the counsellor to support the client with any of the issues that he/she brings up and help the individual find his or her own solutions to the problems. Vacc and Loesch study cited in Cheruiyot and Orodho (2015) study confirmed that consideration of personality skills when appointing a counsellor. This was because the personality of a counsellor affected his or her behaviour when handling the counselee. However, given such situations or scenario in secondary schools in Anambra State whereby enough or sufficient time are not allotted to guidance counselling services or sessions, school principals poor focus or paying less attention to counselling services coupled with inappropriate use of professional counsellors in guidance and counselling services, as confirmed in Bolu-Steve and Oredugba (2017) study, all these could also be responsible for the inappropriate use of counselling skills by school counsellors during guidance and counselling services in the secondary schools in Anambra State. If counsellors do not possess the necessary counselling skills, this will have grievous negative impact or effect on students' learning with consequences on students' academic achievements. This is confirmed by Njoku (2007) study which found out that without the school counsellors' intervention and skills, the good work of subject teachers and school administrators may become compromised and ineffective. The poor and unimpressive performance of Nigerian secondary school students is an evidence that professional counselling is lacking in most secondary schools which is assumed to be caused by poor counselling skills of school guidance counsellors to render efficient and quality guidance and counselling services.

It was again discovered through the finding of this present study that there were certain aspects where counsellors could utilize the various counselling skills in addressing students' learning needs for improving their academic achievements in secondary schools in Anambra State. These includes aspects of: poor study or reading habits of students coupled with laziness in studying, students' absenteeism or poor attendance to classes which affects their academic achievements, students' dissatisfaction or low interest in a particular subject impacting negatively on their academic achievements, students' lack of concentration towards their academic pursuit affecting their learning, lack of ability to cope with academic task, students' examination

phobia, issues concerning students' examination misconducts, lack of ability to handle assignments, emotional instability affecting students' academic work, lack of ability to manage time in academics, lack of motivation to learn, behavioural problems which have negative impact on students' learning, poor communication with subject teachers, students inadequate knowledge and skills in some subject areas affecting their performances and academic achievements, aspect of low academic inspiration, poor ability to make rightful career choices, inability to employ different learning strategies for academic successes, areas relating to physical, social or mental health challenges affecting students' learning, aspects connected to students' difficulties in creating new, and ideas or innovations necessary for successful learning. This finding agrees with the studies of Alabi (2006), Bolu-Steve and Oredugba (2017) and Hill (2014) which confirmed through their findings that school counsellors use their professional training, skills, expertise and experience to help students to overcome an area of conflict or block which hitherto has hindered the inter and intra-personal relationships growth and development. The counsellor is strategically placed in secondary schools in order to assist the student to develop ethical standards for educational pursuit. By possession of various counselling skills, they help students to obtain holistic educational development and can assist in-school adolescents to handle behavioural, educational and psychological problems. Also, their counselling skills creates a change in personality organization and structure which are relatively permanent. With this, Hill (2014) concurs in a study that a counsellor is a trained individual who is able to use a different range of counselling approaches and skills with their clients and who are bound by a code of ethics and practices. A counsellor therefore demonstrates unconditional acceptance, genuineness and empathy and will try to understand things from the client's perspective. Supporting the above studies, Lunenburg (2010) confirmed that the counsellor's role by possession of various skills is to assist individuals or students to develop the abilities and potentials to understand themselves, to solve their own academic problems, and to make appropriate adjustments to their environment necessary for improved academic achievements.

Secondary school guidance counsellors therefore, showcase their counselling skills in three domains of: academic, career and personal/social. Their skills help students resolve emotional, social or behavioural problems and help

them develop a clearer focus or sense of direction. For example, if a student's behaviour is interfering with his or her achievement, the school counsellor may observe that student in a class, provide consultation to teachers and other stakeholders to develop (with the student) a plan to address the behavioural issue(s), and then collaborate to implement and evaluate the plan. They also provide consultation services to family members such as college access, career development, parenting skills, study skills, child and adolescent development, and help with school-home transitions (Lunenburg, 2010). The topics of character education, diversity and multiculturalism as confirmed by (Portman, 2009), and school safety are important areas of focus for school counsellors' skills. In essence, given all the findings of this present study, it is important for counsellors in the secondary schools in Anambra State to possess certain counselling skills which will make significant impression on students' learning needs for improving students' academic achievements. The issues surrounding counselling skills possessed by counsellors and students' academic achievements in secondary schools especially those in Anambra State must be given adequate priority concern, attention and due considerations by all education stakeholders in the secondary education sector for academic excellence in the school system.

Conclusion

Counsellors play important role(s) in the secondary schools. Their involvement in the various guidance and counselling services rendered in the schools assist to empower students to put in utmost efforts in their academics which will lead to improving students' academic achievements. Although, it was confirmed through the finding of the present study that the counselling skills possessed by counsellors in the secondary schools in Anambra State could be effectively utilized in addressing students' learning needs for improving students' academic achievements; yet the present study submits that majority of the counsellors do not possess the requisite counselling skills for handling matters affecting students' learning needs. The study however, concludes that the school counsellors did not possess sufficient counselling skills requisite for improving students' academic achievements in secondary schools in Anambra State. This situation calls for adequate redress in order to promote quality learning and education for students' high academic

achievements in secondary schools in Anambra State. Hence, the following recommendations proffered below.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the present study, the following recommendations have been made:

1. Anambra State Post Primary Schools Service Commission (PPSSC) in conjunction with the principals should utilize the necessary means or strategies through coordination of various staff development programmes and use of rewards, in order to equip school counsellors with the requisite counselling skills for improvement of students' academic achievements. However, they should encourage counsellors to frequently participate in in-service training and retraining programmes that will improve their professional counselling skills for improving students' academic achievements.
2. Secondary school principals should ensure the effectiveness of guidance counselling activities which encourages the use of various counselling skills which could be utilized to support students' learning needs necessary for improving students' academic achievements.

References

- Adedipe, V.O. (1997). *Counselling practicum*. International Publishers Limited.
- Akilaiya, O., Oputa-Imala, F.N. & Ezoem, I.N. (2002). *Educational research. A source book for nce and university undergraduates*. Asaba: Ekecy Printers and Publishers.
- Alabi, L. (2006). Attitude of secondary school students towards guidance and counselling programmes in Moro Local Government Area of Kwara State. *Unpublished B.Ed project*. Submitted to the Department of Counsellor Education, University of Ilorin.
- Audu, I.A. (2015). Influence of guidance and counselling services on academic achievement and transition rate of Taraba State students into tertiary institutions. *Unpublished Master's degree project*. Submitted to Department of Educational Foundations, University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN).

- Bolu-Steve, F.N. & Oredugba, O.O. (2017). Influence of counselling services on perceived academic performance of secondary school students in Lagos State. *International Journal of Instruction*, 10 (2), 211-228. Retrieved from http://www.e-iji.net/dosyalar/iji_2017_2_14.pdf.
- Bossaert, G., Doumen, S., Buyse, E. & Versechueren. K. (2011). *Predicting children's academic achievement after the transition to first grade: A two-year longitudinal study*. Retrieved from <http://www.eric.ed.gov/>.
- Cheruiyot, D.K. & Orodho, J.A. (2015). Guidance and counselling: What is the level of human and physical resource preparedness in providing effective services in secondary schools in Bureti Sub County, Kericho County, Kenya? *Journal of Education and Practice*, 6 (23), 132-143. Retrieved from www.iiste.org.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2013). *National policy on education, sixth edition*. Abuja: NERDC.
- Hill, H. (2014). What is the difference between counselling and counselling skills? Retrieved from <https://inyourcommunity.org.uk/2014/01/31/what-is-the-difference-between-a-counsellor-and-counselling-skills/>.
- Kituyi, O.W. (2014). Guiding and counselling practice in relation to academic performance. *Unpublished master's degree project*. Submitted to the Department of Psychology, School of Education, University of Nairobi.
- Lunenburg, F.C. (2010). School guidance and counseling services. *Schooling*, 1 (1), 1-9.
- Maduekwe, O. (2002, Nov. 15), The idea of Nigeria, *Guardian newspaper*, 45.
- Mbang, S. (2002, August 27). Education for religious sects. *Vanguard newspaper*, 3.
- Njoku, O.C. (2007). Optimization of service delivery in Nigerian secondary schools: The contributions of guidance and counselling. *Optimization of Service Delivery in the Education Sector: Issues and Strategies*.
- Ncharam, S.O. (2005). The effect of enquiry and lecture methods of teaching on students' performance in senior secondary schools II chemistry. *Nigerian Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 12 (2), 58-60.
- Nworgu, B.G. (2015). *Educational research. Basic issues and methodology, third edition*. Nsukka: University Trust Publishers.
- Nzeneri, I.S. (2010). *An introduction to research methods and statistics (Revised edition)*. Uyo: Abigab Associates Limited.

- Okumu, A. (2007). *Introduction to guidance and counselling*. Retrieved from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Creative_Commons.
- Onyiliofor, F.N. (2011). Counselling skills for improving academic performance of secondary school students in Nsukka education zone of Nigeria. *International Journal of Research in Arts and Social Sciences*, 3, 226-237.
- Portman, M. (2009). Educational psychology and the education of teachers: A reaction. *Educational Psychologist*, 31 (1), 23-28.
- Shaterloo, A. & Mohammadyari, G. (2011). Students counselling and academic achievement. *Procedia - Social and Behavioural Sciences*, 30, 625 – 628. Retrieved from www.sciencedirect.com.