

INFLUENCE OF COUNSELLORS' GENDER ON STUDENTS' APPROACH TOWARDS GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING RELATIONSHIP IN SCHOOL SETTING

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Abstract

This study was conducted to determine the influence of gender of the counsellor on students' attitude towards guidance and counselling profession in Rivers State. The study was guided by one purpose of study, three research questions and three hypotheses formulated and tested at 0.05 alpha level of significance. The scope of the study covered male and female students' preference towards male counsellors, male and female students' preference towards female counsellors and male and female students' attitude towards male counsellors. The research design adopted for the study was ex-post facto with a total population of 280 students from senior secondary school III SS III. Simple random sampling technique was employed to select respondents and institutions to get the sample students used for the study. The instrument for data collection was a 15-item questionnaire structured on a four-point scale format. The instrument was validated by two specialists, one in guidance and counselling and another in Educational Measurement. Test-retest approach was used to authenticate the reliability of the study which yielded a coefficient value of 0.81. Mean and standard deviation and t-test statistics was used to test the four hypotheses formulated for the study. The results indicated that male clients had no choice of counsellor while female students develop more interest on male counselors. The study recommended among other things that Rivers State ministry of education in charge of posting of guidance counsellors to schools should consider to post male and female counsellors to schools to cater for the needs of the gender of the students.

Key Words: Counselling, counsellor, gender, guidance, Influence.

Introduction

There are about one hundred and fifteen guidance counsellor personnel engaged in rendering services in guidance and counselling in Rivers State. About one hundred and one of them received professional training up to bachelor degree, few others, less than one hundred of them got higher degrees and diploma certificate in guidance and counselling, (Rivers State ministry of education, 2018). The rest of them are either career masters or those chosen by individual schools to take charge of guidance services with the students and significant others. The notion of having career masters in schools is in line with the Federal Government directive in the National Policy on Education (2004) that schools that have no trained counsellors should select some of their teachers

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and train internally for the purpose of helping the maladjusted behaviours of the secondary school students. Away from making concerted efforts in making counselling services available in all secondary schools (Oyinloye, 2019 and Gale,2015) opine that lack of trust, confidence as well as the slow pace of counselling in our schools is alarming. Some of the reasons popularly advanced for the failure of counselling services in schools ranges from the shortage of guidance counsellors, scarcity of funds to the attitudes of students and counsellor's sex. These have generated some heated arguments over the years unresolved.

Several studies have shown client's choice of counsellors by gender. While some of the research findings indicated that male students/clients prefer male counsellors during counselling, others indicated that male clients prefer female counsellors. In the same way, evidence from some other studies revealed that female clients generally like female counsellors to attend to them during counselling. Okoakor (2013) and Watkins (2007) found in their studies that the sex of the counsellor affect students' lack of interest and attitude variation towards guidance and counselling services in schools. Bakare (2016) found that female clients like choosing male counsellors because of the influence of opposite sex on interaction. This contradicts Dickson (2018) who earlier found that female clients prefer female counsellors during counselling sessions. Okon et al., (2018) have also contended that male students would always like to discuss career, personal-social and life problems with male counsellors because of their wealth of experience and cordial approach. The contention of Ikeotuonye and Okon (2020) above seemed controversial because guidance and counselling is usually seen as a woman's job (Sheltzer & Stone, 1980 and Ifelunni, 2018). As the controversy rages on, the gap (which is placed on sex in counselling) becomes necessary to be filled hence this study is focused towards determining the position by which gender of counsellors take in counselling relationships in Rivers State, Nigeria. Conducting a study on attitude of students towards counsellor's gender among the senior secondary school students in Agege-Lagos State, Robert (2016) used one research question and two hypotheses to carry out his study. The study adopted an ex-post facto design, the population consisted of 150 students (male and female) comprising of a 12-item questionnaire with two sections was used and validated by two specialists in psychology and counselling. Analysis of covariance was used to test the hypotheses while mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions. The result indicated that female students preferred male counsellors during counselling relationship. The major purpose of this study was to determine the type of counsellors' gender that the secondary school students/clients would prefer to approach during counselling services. In specific terms, the study covered; female students' attitude towards male counsellors, male and female students' attitude towards female counsellors and female clients' interest in other dimensions of counselling with female counsellors. The study focused on senior secondary students III students who have enough guidance and counselling experience in their school year as they are at the terminal point of their secondary schooling.

Statement of the problem

Since the inception of guidance and counselling services by Federal Government in the National Policy on Education (2004), it has suffered serious disadvantages. Most of the secondary schools do not have trained counsellors while the few with guidance counsellors have not lived up to

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expectations in terms of the provision of guidance services. The serious argument is whether the counsellor's sex could be responsible for the negative secondary school students' attitude towards counselling. And if the sex of the counsellor can affect the student's attitude negatively, which of the sexes will be preferred by the male students and females students. This study is to ascertain the most preferred gender of counsellor by students. This study was delimited to senior secondary school students (SS III) because of their long experiences in the school.

Research Questions

The following research hypotheses guided this study :Four hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 alpha level of significance to guide the study thus:

H₀₁ : There is no significant difference between male and female students' preference towards male counsellors.

H₀₂: The is no other significant difference between male and female students' preference towards male counsellors is not significant.

H₀₃ :There is no significant difference between the male and female students' preference in the male counsellors on personal-social dimensions of counselling and female counsellor.

H₀₄ : There is no significance difference between the female students preference in other dimensions of counselling and female counsellors.

Methodology

The study adopted ex-post facto design which does not allow the researcher control the independent variables and therefore cannot manipulate them. The population for the study comprised of 280 students from six senior secondary (SSS III). The study used simple random sampling techniques to select six senior secondary schools. The participants comprised of 140 males and 140 females drawn from the six secondary schools. The instrument for data collection was a 15-item questionnaire titled: Clients' Attitude Towards the Gender of Counsellors Questionnaire (CAGCQ) designed to check students' opinion about counsellor's gender of choice for counselling. The instrument was converted into a four-point scale format of strongly agree, (SA), Agree (A), strongly disagree (SD) and disagree (D) with 4, 3, 2, 1 points respectively. The instrument was validated by two specialists, one in guidance and counselling and another in education measurement and evaluation. Mean and standard deviation was used to answer the research questions while t-test statistics was employed to analyse the hypotheses.

Results

Hypothesis one H₀₁ There is no significant difference between male and female students' preference towards male counsellors.

Table 1: t-test on male and female students' preference towards male counsellors.

| Respondents | N | \bar{x} | std | df | t-cal | t-crit | Decision |
|-----------------|-----|-----------|------|-----|-------|--------|------------------------|
| Female students | 140 | 1.63 | 1.84 | 278 | 1.65 | 1.64 | Reject H ₀₁ |
| Male students | 140 | 1.80 | 0.96 | | | | |

Table 1 revealed a mean of 1.63, standard deviation (std) of 1.84 for female students, while the male students had mean of 1.80 and standard deviation of 0.96 degree of freedom df of 278, t-calculated of 1.65 and t-critical of 1.30 respectively were obtained. The t-calculated of 1.65 was greater than the t-critical value of 1.64; which implies that the null hypothesis of no significant

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difference was rejected. It was concluded that the male students' preference towards male counsellors and female counsellors was not a hindrance to counselling activities in the secondary schools.

Hypothesis 2 H_{02} :The is no other significance difference between male and female students' preference towards male counsellors is not significant

Table 2: t-test analysis on male and female students' preference towards male counsellors

| Respondents | N | \bar{x} | Std | df | t-cal | t-crit | Decision |
|-----------------|-----|-----------|------|-----|-------|--------|-----------------|
| Female students | 140 | 1.55 | 0.73 | 278 | 1.65 | 1.64 | Reject H_{02} |
| Male students | 140 | 3.40 | 0.95 | | | | |

Table 2 indicated that mean of 1.55, standard deviation (std) of 0.73, degree of freedom df of 278, t-calculated of 1.65 and t-critical of 13.65 were respectively obtained as responses from the students. From the table, the t-calculated value of 1.65 is more than the t-critical of 1.64 It can therefore be concluded that the female clients' attitude towards the female counsellors doesn't hinder counselling relationship.

Research Hypothesis H_{03} :There is no significant difference between the male and female students' preference in male counsellors on personal-social dimensions of counselling and female counsellor.

Table 3: t-test analysis of the male and female students' preference in male counsellors on personal-social dimensions of counselling and female counsellor.

| Variables | N | \bar{x} | std | df | t-cal | t-crit | Decision |
|-----------------|-----|-----------|-------|-----|-------|--------|----------|
| Female students | 140 | 72.2 | 48.72 | 278 | 6.50 | 1.64 | Sig. |
| Male students | 140 | 24.81 | 36.72 | | | | |

Testing at the alpha level of probability of 0.05, the calculated of 6.50 and t-critical of 2.617 were obtained. Since the t-calculated of 6.50 is greater than the t-critical of 1.64 at 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected. It is therefore, concluded that there is a significant difference between female students interest in male counsellors on personal-social dimension of counselling than other aspects of counselling.

H_{04} : There is no significance difference between the female students preference in other dimensions of counselling and female counsellors

Table 4: t-test analysis on male and female students' preference in the male counsellors on personal-social dimensions of counselling and female counsellor.

| Variables | N | \bar{x} | std | df | t-cal | t-crit | Decision |
|-----------------|-----|-----------|-------|-----|-------|--------|-----------------|
| Female students | 140 | 71.2 | 47.72 | 278 | 4.50 | 1.64 | Reject H_{04} |
| Male students | 140 | 24.81 | 37.72 | | | | |

* Testing at the alpha level of probability of 0.05,

The t-calculated of 4.50 and t-Critical of 2.31 were obtained. Since the t-calculated of 4.50 is greater than the t-critical of 1.64 at 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis is rejected. It is

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therefore, concluded that there is a significant difference between female students interest in other dimensions of counselling with the female counsellors.

Discussion on Findings

This study was to investigate the influence of counsellors' gender on the choice of students in secondary schools. This study indicated that there was a positive attitude between the male and female students on the male counsellors, as shown in table 1. The two sexes of students on a general note preferred male counsellors in almost all issues in various dimensions of counseling, such as educational, career, occupational, personal-social and others. This finding agreed with the findings of Watkins (2007) who contended that female students preferred male counsellors. It also agreed with Hopner and Pew (1989) as well as Bakare (2016) who found that clients preferred male counsellors to female counsellors. Okon et al., (2020) and Okon (2018) findings also agreed with this current study. The findings disagreed with Dickstein (2019) and Ifelumi (2018) who found that counselling profession is for women. It is surprising that female clients would like to be attended to by male counsellors for solutions to their problems. However, Bakare (2016) asserts that influence of the opposite gender on counselling might not be ruled out as female students are likely to seek counselling from their female counselors, while the male students would prefer male counsellors. This present study showed that there was significant difference between the attitude of male and female students towards male counsellors. The female students registered a mean score of 1.65 while their male counterparts scored 13.65 in table 2, this therefore implied that female students preferred male counselors than the female counsellors. The female students are likely to open up to male counsellors than their female counsellors during counselling relationships probably because male counsellors may be more trusted in keeping confidential information than their female counterparts as perceived by the students. The findings agreed with Okoakor (2013) who opined that the gender of the counsellor is a critical factor in the choice of counselling relationship. Furthermore, Okoakor (2013) reported that female students perceive female counsellors as may not keep to counselling issues of critical importance and therefore may reject opening up. The sex of the counsellor has no much effect on the male students hence they were found to be ready, free and willing to enter into counselling dialogue with any sex of the counsellors. Similar to the above findings, this study found that in most of the secondary schools in Rivers State, where male counsellors were posted, majority of the female students indicated interest and willingness to visit the male counsellor for their personal-social problems but the students were only ready to dialogue and interact educational and career problems with the female counsellor. Analysis of data on table 3 showed that female students were more interested in discussing their personal-social issues with the male counsellors. This is buttressed by the remarkable responses from the female students positively inclined to seeking for counselling with the male counselors, but indicated that they may visit the female counsellors on other dimensions of counselling such as vocational, educational, career among other dimensions of counselling. This development was subscribed by Egbezor (2017) who asserted that the female students have interest with the male counsellors in some types of counselling. He visualised reasons that the male counsellors may keep more personal secrets than the females counsellors who would like to gossip their clients' secrets. If this is important, it implies that male counsellors would witness influx of the male and female students than the female counsellors for counselling dialogue.

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Conclusion

The gender of guidance counsellors have been observed to have influence on the operations of guidance and counselling in secondary schools. The male counsellors seem to be more central to male and female students in their choices of sex of counsellors. But the female students appear to be more freer with the male counselors in cases about educational, career, vocational, informational and other dimensions of counselling order than personal-social matters. On the whole the male and female students have the desire to dialogue and visit the male guidance counsellors and open up to them during counselling more than to female counsellors who are perceived as traitors and gossipers and therefore cannot keep deep secrets of clients especially personal secrets.

Recommendations

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

- 1.The ministry of education and educational administrators whose duty it is to post and redeploy guidance counsellors to schools should consider posting both gender of counsellors to schools as to permit choice of gender of counselors.
- 2.Since male counsellors are on the front burner and choice of majority of clients/students, the tertiary institutions whose duty it is to admit students into counselling programmes should consider male applicants more in their yearly admissions for guidance and counselling programmes.
- 3.Counselling is built on the principle of secrecy and confidentiality of all divulged information, counsellors should as a matter of necessity continue to maintain confidentiality at all times as this would allow trust on the part of the students.
- 4 .Genuineness and congruence implies in counselling a state of lack of pretence, fakery, insincerity and unreal in counselling. When these ingredients have enveloped the counsellor, then will the client see in him genuine trust and reliable person to open up to discuss problem. The female counsellors invariably are therefore expected to show genuineness and congruence in their dealings with all the clients that may come their way for counselling, so that both the male and female clients can embrace them as a reliable friend to open up to in all their problems. The same female counsellors should in all circumstances show to the clients unconditional positive regard which in its entirety speaks about absence of discrimination and reservation, threat-free atmosphere as all these will motivate the clients to open up for interaction with the counsellor. When these factors are invoke, it will enhance constructive personality-change of the client. Finally, and most importantly, the female counsellors should endear trust, confidence, acceptance and simple-mindedness to the client through the application of emphatic and psychological contact which will permit cordial interaction.

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