



## **Strategies for Achieving Best Practices Among Counselors in Anambra State Secondary School**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The paper examined the strategies that could be employed to achieve best practices among practicing counselors in Anambra State Secondary Schools. The study adopted a descriptive survey design and was guided by two research questions. The only hypothesis of the study was tested at 0.05 level of significance. An instrument known as "Achieving Best Practices Questionnaire (ABPQ) was employed to collect data. The data gathered were statistically analysed using mean, standard deviation and t – test. The result of the analysis revealed that best practices will be achieved when counselors perform their expected roles, abide by the ethics of the profession and attend to the needs and aspirations of her public. Based on the findings of the study, it was suggested that the government should enact a law making the practice of counseling compulsory in all schools and counselors should execute their duties in line with the ethics of the profession to achieve the goal of counseling

### **INTRODUCTION**

Guidance and counseling as an educational programme has been integrated into the Nigerian educational system at all levels. It is the process of assisting individuals who are in difficulty or need overcome their problems. The assistance may be in the area of educational, vocational or personal-social concern. Guidance and counseling provides opportunity for individuals to better understand themselves, their potentials and their relationship to the world in which they live. It assist individuals in the making of choices, plan and decisions or adjustments in situation in order to develop positive behaviour. The guidance and counseling services include; placement, appraisal, information, career planning, evaluation, counseling and research.

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In Nigeria, guidance and counseling services are being provided by both counselors and non-counselors. This practice seem to have adversely affected the growth and development of counselling profession in Nigeria. The educational policy adopted by some states like Anambra and other states in the South-East where counselors are forced to teach school subjects in addition to their counseling duties does not help matter. The combination of teaching and counseling work by professional counselors do not give the counselors the opportunity to render effective and efficient service to their clients. This practice also affects the ethics of the profession negatively.

It has been erroneously believed by many that since counseling is a helping service, any individual could render that helping service to the other individual. Those who subscribe to this understanding continue then that nothing is special about counseling. But a search into literature has revealed that being nice, caring and advising people do not ensure effective counseling (Peterson & Eisenberg, 1991). It has also been observed that having acquired a prescribed course of study does not guarantee one to be an effective counselor. The present trend does not provide the opportunity for the attainment of best practices in the field of counseling.

Best practices in counseling refers to the most excellent, suitable or desirable way by which a professional counselor renders his services to his client and the general public. It also involves the most successful, clear, able or skillful way of carrying out counseling services to those who desire for them. The attainment of best practices in counseling in Nigeria has not been fully achieved due to some problems. Okeke (2003) identified these problems to include; lack of government support, lack of counseling facilities, non-professionalisation of counseling and obnoxious government polices. The fact that counseling is not yet a full fledged profession in Nigeria, has created opportunities for non-professionals to invade the practice of counseling in public and private secondary schools.

In view of these observed bottlenecks, it has become necessary to investigate some strategies which if adopted will enhance the attainment of best practices by counselor in Anambra State secondary schools.

#### **Purpose of the Study**

The overall purpose of the study is to examine the strategies for achieving best practices among counselors in Anambra State. Specifically the study sets out to:

1. Find out suggested strategies by Guidance counselors to achieve best practices.
2. Ascertain if counselors differ in their opinion on the strategies to achieve best practices based on experience.

#### **Research questions**

The study was guided by the following research questions.

1. What strategies are suggested by Guidance Counsellors to achieve best practices in counselling profession?
2. How do the opinion of experienced counselors differ from those of the less experienced ones on the strategies to enhance the attainment of best practices in counselling?

### **Hypothesis**

The study was also guided by a null hypothesis thus: There is no significant difference between experienced and less experienced counselors on their suggested strategies in achieving best practices in Counselling.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study adopted a survey design in which no variable was manipulated. The population of the study comprised all the 299 Guidance Counsellors operating in Anambra State Public Secondary Schools. The sample consisted of 240 Guidance Counsellors selected from 240 secondary schools. A total of 40 schools were sampled from each of the six education zones in Anambra State. The zones consisted of area, Aguata, Awka, Onitsha, Ogidi Nnewi, and Otuocha. The simple random sampling technique was employed to select one Guidance Counsellor in schools that had more than one. The same technique was also adopted in the selection of schools used for the study.

The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled "Strategies for Achieving Best Practices in Counselling Questionnaire" (SABPCQ). The SABPCQ consisted of 15 items with two major Sections A and B. Section A dealt with the bio-data of the respondents whereas Section B highlighted the strategies which if implemented would enhance the attainment of best practices in counselling as a profession.

The response format adopted was a four point scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree Disagree (AD) and Strongly Disagree (SD).

The responses were rated as follows: SA = 4 points, A = 3 points, DA = 2 points and SD = 1 point.

The decision rule is that any item with mean score of 2.50 and above was accepted while items with mean score of 2.5 and below were rejected. The data gathered were analysed using mean, standard deviation and t-test statistics.

A copy of the instrument was later given to three experts drawn from the Faculty of Education of Anambra State University to validate. The experts were requested to ascertain the appropriateness of the items, the language of

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construction and the ability of the test items to answer the research questions. The criticisms and suggestions of the experts were incorporated in the final copy of the questionnaire.

Again, the reliability of the instrument was determined using test-retest method. The questionnaire was administered on 20 Guidance Councilors drawn from 20 Secondary Schools in Enugu state. Two weeks later, the same instrument was re-administered on the same 20 respondents on the pretext that the former questionnaires were lost on transit. Later, the results of the first and second administration were correlated using Pearson Moment correlation coefficient and this yielded a value of 0.86. This value (0.86) was considered high enough and was used for data collection.

## RESULTS

The data analysis was carried out based on the research questions and hypothesis that guided the conduct of the study.

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation responses on the suggested strategies counselors prefer

S/No	Description of Items	Mean	Sd	Remarks
1	Provision of equipment and facilities for counselling practice	3.13	1.04	Agree
2	Embarking on individual and group research work	3.05	0.97	Agree
3	Professionalization of counselling in Nigeria	2.91	0.95	Agree
4	Training and re-training of counselor	3.34	0.82	
5	Definition of counselor role/functions	1.92	0.89	Disagree
6	Establishment of a common curriculum or syllabus for institutions	3.18	0.84	Agree
7	Special remuneration or salary for professional counselors	3.25	0.84	Agree
8	Consulting with experts within and outside the profession	2.76	0.94	Agree
9	Regular attendant to workshops and seminars	3.14	0.71	Agree
10	Setting up of standards of practice by counselling Assoc. of Nigeria (Ethical Standards)	2.88	0.83	Agree
11	Scholarship for practicing counselors for further studies	3.23	0.82	Agree
12	Collaborating with other professionals in dealing with complex cases	3.00	0.86	Agree
13	Setting up a task team to monitor and supervise counselors in practice.	2.96	0.89	Agree
14	Setting up of a Board of trustees to handle all matters bothering on professional misconduct	3.10	1.06	Agree
15	Enacting an act of parliament on counselling practice in Nigeria	2.60	1.02	Agree

The data in table I shows that respondents agreed with all the items except item 5 as strategies that could enhance the attainment of best practices in counselling as a profession.

**Table 2:** Mean and Standard Deviation responses on the opinion of experienced and less experienced counselors on their suggested strategies.

S/No	Description of Items	X	Sd	Remarks	X	Sd	Remarks
1	Provision of facilities/equipment	2.98	0.84	<b>Agree</b>	2.85	0.86	<b>Agree</b>
2	Embarking on individual and group research	3.01	0.98	Agree	2.93	1.05	Agree
3	Professionalization of counselling.	3.04	1.14	Agree	2.90	1.07	Agree
4	Training and retraining of counselors	3.23	1.03	Agree	3.13	1.08	Agree
5	Definition of counselors Role/Function	2.02	0.99	Disagree	1.89	0.96	Disagree
6	Establishing Uniform	3.14	0.97	Agree	3.01	0.85	Agree
7	Special salary and allowances for counselors	3.01	0.85	Agree	3.15	0.69	Agree
8	Consulting with experts	3.40	0.97	Agree	2.82	0.91	Agree
9	Attendance to Workshop and seminars	3.18	0.96	Agree	2.92	0.80	<b>Agree</b>
10	Establishment ethical standards for practice	3.25	0.96	Agree	3.03	1.05	Agree
11	Scholarship for counselor who wish to go for further school	2.80	0.84	Agree	2.63	1.00	Agree
12	Collaborating with other professional	3.08	0.82	Agree	2.62	1.01	Agree
13	Setting up a task team to monitor and supreme counselors	2.93	0.81	Agree	2.25	0.84	Agree
14	Setting up a Board of trustee to curb misconduct	2.63	0.92	Agree	2.81	0.95	Agree
15	Enacting an act of parliament for counsellors	2.84	0.93	<b>Agree</b>	2.62	1.02	<b>Agree</b>
	Total X Score	44.74	27.48	Agree	41.45	14.14	Agree

Data in table 2 highlights the general opinion of experienced and less experienced counselor on strategies aimed at achieving best practices in counselling. The data analysis showed that the experienced counselors had a mean score of 44.74. Whereas their colleagues who are less experience scored 41.45. This implies that experienced counselors have developed more strategies than those with less experienced in counselling practice.

### **Testing of Hypothesis**

The only hypothesis of the study was tested at 0.05 level of significant as shown in table 3.

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**Table 3:** T-test statistics on the strategies preferred by experienced and less experienced counselors.

Source of Variation	N	X	Sd	T-Cal	T-Crit	Level of Significance	
Experienced Counsellors	176	44.74	27.48	3.60	1.96	0.05	H <sub>01</sub> ;
Less experienced Counsellors	64	41.45	14.14				Rejected

Since the calculated t-test (3.60) is greater than the critical t-(1.56) at 0.05 level of significant, the null hypothesis is therefore rejected while the alternative is accepted. This implies that experienced and less experienced counselors do not express the same opinion on the suggested strategies to achieve best practices in counselling.

### DISCUSSION

The outcome of the study showed that counselors are aware of several strategies which if adopted will help to achieve best practices in counselling profession. The strategies identified include; training and retraining of counselors, use of uniform curriculum in counselor training institutions, payment of special allowances/salaries to counselors, consulting with experts, defining counselors role, provision of facilities in schools, professionalization of counselling among others.

The findings of this study agree with Odoemelam (2011), Denga (2008) and Kolo (2001) who contended that the development of a unique and uniform curriculum of counselling education, loyalty to the profession, abiding by the ethics of counselling, and embarking in research as the major strategies that will enhance the practice of counselling in Nigeria. Although counselling may be aware of the strategies but the extent of their implementation left much to be desired particularly in Anambra State.

The study also revealed that there is significant difference between experienced counselors and the less experienced ones in their on the strategies to achieve best practices. The experienced counselors tend to have more information on the existing strategies that will facilitate the attainment of best practices in the profession unlike their less experiences colleagues. The outcome of this study is in agreement with Ofojebe (2006) Okonkwo (1999) and Obi (2010) who argued that the effectiveness of a counselor in practice is dependent on the experience he has gathered over the years. This finding is further supported by a common maxim, which states that experience is the best teacher. There is no gainsaying the fact that an individual who have practiced a particular profession for five to ten years is

supposed to have gathered much information, skill and aptitude with which to deal with challenges arising in his profession. It is not always possible for people to give what they do not have. This is the case of young counselors who may have little or no knowledge about most of the strategies that will enhance counselling as a profession. In further support of this finding, Obikeze (2010) have advocated the need for guidance counselors to go for mentorship after graduating from the university to enable them acquire the necessary skills, knowledge and aptitude required during practice “This is the case with other professions like Medicine, Law, Pharmacy among others.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study has examined the strategies suggested by counselors that could be used to achieve best practices in counselling. The strategies identified include; adoption of a common curriculum, loyalty to the Profession, defining of counselors role, embarking on research, provision of facilities, professionlization of counselling, training and retraining of practicing counselors among others. The study agreed that experience is a very important variable in counselling practice. The respondents were of the new that counselors who have practiced for many years (5-10 years) are likely going to be more aware about the prevailing strategies that could be used unlike the less experienced ones (1-4 years) most of whom lack the competencies to operate. The study concludes that professional counselors should identify and use all the strategies at their disposal to tackle counselling challenges during practice irrespective of their years of practice.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

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

- (1) The National University Commission should adopt a unique and common curriculum for all institutions involved in the training of Guidance Counsellors.
- (2) Counsellors should endeavour to attend local and international workshops and conferences on Guidance and Counselling. This exposure will enable them acquire new strategies that will help them in the performance of their job.
- (3) The federal and state governments should embark on the training and retraining of counselors to enable them acquires relevant knowledge, skills and aptitude for effective practice.

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- (4) Guidance Counsellors should continue to conduct researches in the area of Guidance Counselling. Such research could be conducted individually or in group.
- (5) Counsellors should consult their colleagues in the profession as and when necessary to help them out when in difficulties. They may also seek the services of people in other professions to achieve better results.
- (6) The counselling Association of Nigeria should work in concert with the Federal Ministry of Education to make counselling a profession.
- (7) Counsellors should get into advocacy to sell the counselling profession to the general public. They must be loyal to the profession and work towards achieving the goal of their clients and those of the society where they work.

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