

Improving Quality of Counsellor Education in Nigeria Via Practicum Supervision

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Abstract

The study investigated teachers' perceptions of the causes of gender differences in mathematics achievement among secondary school students. The study was carried in Owerri Education Zone I of Imo State Nigeria using descriptive survey research design. A sample of 150 mathematics teachers was used for the study comprising of 90 males and 60 females. A 21-item likert 4 points type of questionnaire titled "causes of gender difference in mathematics achievement (CGDMA)" drawn by the researcher was used for data collection. The instrument had reliability coefficient (r) of 0.81 determined using Cronbach's alpha method. The result generated was analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer research questions while the hypotheses were analyzed using chi-square (χ^2) and t-test statistical tools tested at 0.05 level of significance. The result of the study revealed series of factors causing gender differences in mathematics achievement which are, teacher, students and parent related. Based on the result it was recommended that teachers should use innovative strategies in teaching mathematics to get both male and female students involved in classroom activities.

Key words: Teachers perceptions; Causes; Gender difference; Mathematics achievement

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INTRODUCTION

Counselling is a helping profession with reconstruction and rehabilitation processes. It also involves a self revealing relationship with both preventive and curative of maladaptive and self destructive tendencies. Counselling being the third main force of education after instruction and administration (Idowu, 2004), its relevance in the education system cannot be questioned. Hence, the National Policy on Education (2004), the highest policy document on education in Nigeria makes the following pronouncement regarding counselling:

In view of the apparent ignorance of many people about career prospects and in view of personality maladjustment among school children, career officers and counsellors shall continue to make provisions for the training of interested teachers in guidance and counselling. Guidance and counselling shall also feature in teacher education programmes. Proprietors of schools shall provide guidance counselors in adequate number in each primary and post-primary school (NPE, 2004, p.5).

In the light of the above, counsellor education was introduced into faculties of education in the Nigerian universities with the aim of producing guidance counsellors that will take up the much needed functions of the counsellors in Nigerian schools.

Counsellor education can be defined as an academic discipline that has its roots in education, clinical supervision, counselling, human development, vocational guidance, psychology and other human services and occupations. The primary focus of counsellor education is the training and preparation of professional counsellors. This includes recruiting and training the next generation

of academics who teach the curriculum of counselling theory and practice. Counsellor education programme promotes personal growth in trainee counsellors by encouraging them to develop attitudes, values and beliefs which will enhance and facilitate the helping process. Counselling practicum, one of the courses in counsellor education programme, provides this opportunity in a realistic setting.

Ugwuegbulam and Njoku (1997) defined counselling practicum as a component of the counsellor education programme in which the theories, procedures, skills and principles taught theoretically are put into practice by trainee counsellors under the supervision of an experienced and qualified professional counsellor educator. Echebe (2012) corroborates that practicum is the application of theories, procedures and techniques in the complex process of assisting clients to resolve their problems. Going further, Eneasator, Umezulike and Nwadinobi (2012) defined practicum as that section of the counsellor education programme by means of which some efforts are made to orient the trainee counsellors on what is expected of them in the counselling practicum experience and the role of the supervised practicum experience in the course of their professional education as counsellors. In agreement with the above definitions, Aman and Ahmad (2010) defined practicum in counselling as a course of study designed especially for the preparation of counsellors and clinicians that involves the supervised practical application of previously studied theories of counselling. It is among the most important experiences in the counselling programme because it is usually designed to provide trainee counsellors with closely supervised counselling practice at an approved school, field or agency. Hence, Ekwe and Nwamuo (2008), Echebe (2012), Ugwuegbulam and Njoku (1997), Eneasator, Umezulike and Nwadinobi (2012) all pointed out that one of the important goals of counselling practicum exercise is to enable student-counsellors to practice counselling skills and techniques associated with different counselling theories in a laboratory setting as well as in the field. Another goal of counselling practicum is to develop the expertise of counsellor trainees to do individual counselling in a professional setting. This is accomplished by helping the trainee counsellors combine his/her counselling skills and personality into an effective therapeutic style while enhancing the counsellors' growth as a person and as a professional counsellor. It should be noted that both counsellor education and practicum play vital roles in producing quality counsellors. Hence, the higher education must ensure that training of counsellors is equally with proper input in the field of counselling both in the theory and practice.

1. HOW PRACTICUM IS DONE

Trainee counsellors who are due to embark on fieldwork practicum exercise are usually exposed to several courses

of study. These include general education courses such as Environmental Education among others which have little or no relevance to the exercise they are going for. The writers are of the opinion that such courses that have no place in counsellor education should be removed from the counselling curriculum. This is because counselling is only offered as a course, from the Post NCE level. Thus, the trainee counsellors are expected to have done all the general education courses deemed necessary prior to this time so as to focus more on counselling courses.

However, they are also exposed to a counselling course of study titled "Introduction to Practicum", whereby they are taught all they need to know and do in the field during the fieldwork practicum exercise. Trainee counsellors are taught how to get clients; make use of the skills they have acquired; put to appropriate use the psychological assessment instruments; apply suitable counselling techniques in their counselling relationships; make judicious use of tapes and cassette recordings and interpretations as well as keep a comprehensive log book. This field work counselling practicum exercise which comes after the theoretical classroom experience is usually expected to last for twelve weeks, though, oftentimes divided into two segments of six weeks each. Though this field work practicum exercise is done at the first degree level, it is still repeated at the post graduate levels. This is because in practicum exercise lies the heart of counselling practice.

Orientation exercise is usually organized for the trainee counsellors prior to their posting to schools for field work practicum exercise by the practicum committee. Please note that presently, trainee counsellors are only posted to schools for the exercise. This is as a result of the origin of Guidance and Counselling as stipulated in the National Policy on Education (2004) whereby the focus was on providing the schools with career masters. Hence, counsellors were meant to be in schools. However, things are changing with time. Presently, some institutions are diversifying and involving some other areas of counselling needs such as marital, industrial, clinical counselling among others at the post graduate level.

The trainee counsellors are usually assigned to supervisors whose duty is to visit and assess them in the course of their field work. They also visit their supervisors every two weeks during the exercise, so as to discuss any challenging issues, difficult tasks and conflicts they might have encountered. The supervisors therefore assist the trainee counsellors in resolving such issues as the need arises. This is very vital because of the crucial role which the practicum exercise plays in producing quality counsellors. Effective supervision therefore becomes very pertinent for the production of quality counsellor. Then, on completion of the practicum exercise the trainee counsellor should have a one-to-one contact with the supervisor whereby he submits at least three recorded

tapes, each handling one of the three major areas of counselling (educational, personal-social and vocational). The submitted tapes should be reviewed as this offers the trainee counsellors opportunities to take corrections in their weak areas and accept praises and encouragements in their areas of strength.

2. MATERIALS USED FOR PRACTICUM EXERCISE

For an effective practicum exercise to be achieved, the trainee counsellor is required to procure some materials, which are considered his/her work tools from the department and put them to use while on the field work. The materials include but not limited to the following:

- a) The Daily Activity Notebook
- b) Log Book
- c) Clients' Cumulative Record
- d) Counselling Report Forms
- e) Counselling Tapes
- f) Psychological Tests and Assessment Tools etc.
- g) Psychological Assessment Report Forms
- h) Files, etc.

3. THE OBSERVED PITFALLS

Irrespective of the significant importance attached to effective supervision in counselling practicum, the writers have observed various lapses in practicum supervision. These lapses eventually lead to turning out low quality counsellors. In a survey conducted by the writers on effective supervision of practicum exercise using a questionnaire titled "Trainee Counsellors' Supervision Rating Scale" (TCSRS), it was revealed that only 40% of the trainee counsellors are usually supervised in the field during practicum while 60% are left unsupervised at the practicum site. It further showed that only 10% of the tapes recorded during the exercise were actually reviewed by the supervisors on completion of the exercise. This is a clear indication of poor and non-effective supervision on the part of the concerned supervisors. Furthermore, it was revealed that though the trainee counsellors submit not less than 3 tapes that bother on educational, personal-social and vocational issues, some of the supervisors managed to play back only one of the tapes leaving out the other two recorded tapes during tape reviews. Some others play only a few tapes and then make general corrections without having one-on-one contact with the students.

Worse still, there are cases where the trainee counsellors are not provided the opportunity to go on the practicum exercise. They are rather provided with the necessary materials for the exercise and then left unattended to. In such a situation where no practicum is carried out, definitely no supervision is done let alone an

effective one. Such condition is obviously at crossroads with the goals of counselling practicum which hinges on providing the trainee counsellors the opportunity to synthesize and integrate the knowledge and skills gained in prior and concurrent learning experiences and apply them in practical settings (Aman & Ahmed, 2010). This ugly situation hinders professional growth and development of future counsellors and therefore calls for urgent attention and possible interventions.

4. THE WAY FORWARD

Since supervision is said to be the most critical and necessary component of the practicum in counsellor education programme (Ekwe & Nwamuo, 2008), issues concerning counselling practicum supervision should be handled with every seriousness, utmost care and importance. Hence, the writers are of the view that there is an urgent need to improve the quality of practicum supervision carried out by counsellor educators in our various tertiary institutions. To achieve the above stated goals of engaging in field work counselling practicum, the following measures are therefore suggested:

(a) Practicum Committee

A committee should be set up by the departmental head on issues concerning practicum exercise and supervision. The committee members should organize a seminar/workshop for the supervisors prior to the commencement of the supervision exercise. The duties of the supervisors which include visiting the practicum sites; resolving possible challenges encountered by the trainee counsellors at the field work; assessing their performances at sites in synergy with the resident counsellor's report and conducting comprehensive tape reviews for them at the end of the exercise should be well spelt out at the seminar. Everything expected of them in the course of supervision should be well explained to the supervisors. The committee members should also monitor the supervision exercise as it progresses. Towards the end of practicum exercise, they should visit the school and check whether the supervisors actually carried out the supervision.

Again, it is the duty of the practicum committee to organize an orientation exercise for the trainee counsellors prior to their posting to the practicum sites. The committee should as a matter of necessity consider developing and issuing a need assessment instrument such as "Trainee Counsellor's Practicum Readiness Questionnaire" (TCPRQ) to the trainee counsellors so as to ascertain the needs of the student counsellors and channel the orientation towards meeting such identified needs. The orientation may not be a one day affair. It could last for two or three days as the case may be.

(b) Practicum Schedule

The situation whereby practicum is scheduled for only twice in a week for six weeks calls for a revisit. Twice

a week exercise is highly insufficient for the exercise because the trainee counsellors may not be able to effectively handle challenging issues and conclude them within the available time of just two sessions in a week. This limited time schedule also makes for inadequate supervision since the supervisors may not possibly get to all their supervisees within the stipulated time frame. Thus, the writers are of the view that practicum exercise should be scheduled as a daily activity just like teaching practice exercise takes a continuous six weeks for effectiveness. However, the above suggestion may not be practicable presently because the institutions usually mounts other courses both in Guidance and Counselling and in Education for these trainee counsellors within this period of practicum exercise. They are even urged to come back to the institution earlier, on those two days, so as to take such other courses. The writers are of the opinion that such courses should be removed and the trainee counsellors should be allowed to experience a full-time field work practicum exercise.

(c) Post Practicum Exercise

At the end of the practicum exercise supervisors should ensure that the three tapes presented by the trainee counsellors are reviewed using an approved scoring format. Every trainee counsellor should have a feedback on what he/she has submitted. The gains of the tape review lie in the trainee counsellors' ability to know their strength and weaknesses. In other words, the trainee counsellors get to realize how good or otherwise they were able to handle a counselling interview, apply counselling skills; utilize psychological assessment tools and even terminate a counselling relationship through the comments made and corrections pointed out by the supervisors in the course of the tape reviews.

(d) Practicum Settings

Presently, there are lots of innovations in counselling. It is now obvious that counselling services are highly needed wherever human relationship exists. Consequently, institutions are diversifying into some other areas of counselling needs apart from the schools, giving rise to clinical counselling, marital counselling, industrial counselling among others. The writers are therefore suggesting that since the practicum exercise is done in two segments, trainee counsellors should be posted to the school setting for the initial one after which they should

be posted to non-school settings such as hospitals, banks, companies for the second segment of the exercise. This will help to enrich the trainee counsellors' wealth of experience in the field. This suggestion has an implication. It requires that counsellor educators should be well informed in counselling in non-school setting and provide such to their students during the course of training.

CONCLUSION

Since counselling practicum has been identified as being very vital in the production of high quality counsellors, the tertiary institutions concerned with counsellor education programmes must ensure that the exercise is properly carried out. More so, adequate measures that will ensure effective supervision of practicum exercises must be put in place. This will certainly go a long way in achieving the desirable and laudable goals of training and producing quality counsellors in Nigeria.

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