

Perceived Challenges Facing Student Counsellor-Trainees Undertaking Counselling Practicum Among Undergraduates of Guidance and Counselling, University of Ilorin, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study investigated perceived challenges facing student counsellor-trainees undertaking counselling practicum among undergraduates of guidance and counselling in the University of Ilorin, Nigeria. Descriptive research design was adopted for the study. Population consisted undergraduates of University of Ilorin while target population was students offering guidance and counselling as programme of study in University of Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria. In all 200 respondents were selected through multistage sampling method to participate in the study. Data were collected via questionnaire. Data analysis was carried out, using mean, standard deviation, t-test and analysis of variance. The hypotheses were tested at 0.05 alpha level. Findings showed that challenges faced by counsellor-trainees are anxiety, lack of cooperation, among others. Hypotheses tested showed no significant differences in the perception of respondents on the challenges faced by counsellor-trainees undertaking counselling practicum among undergraduates of guidance and counselling in University of Ilorin based on age and religion, however significant difference existed based on gender. It is concluded that undergraduates of guidance and counselling department are facing challenges during practicum exercise. It is recommended that the students should be adequately taught courses in practicum, among other recommendations.

Keywords: challenge, counselling, practicum, undergraduate, university

Introduction

Students undergoing studies in guidance and counselling in tertiary institutions are exposed to various courses aimed at getting them well-grounded in counselling. Guidance and counselling has been included among the courses offered in Nigeria Universities and Colleges of Education approved by Ministry of Education due to its importance in enhancing growth and character change among students and smooth running of schools. Fajonyomi (2020) stated that practicum in counselling is education programme which is targeted at inculcating in the student counsellor-trainees the three domains of learning, knowledge, skills and values needed for counselling. Education is a tool for development and therefore every effort should be made to acquire the actualisation of quality education. Students in schools face challenges that can mar their educational pursuit. These challenges bother on academic, social, psychological, emotional and even spiritual lives of the students. Counselling is a veritable tool to assist the students to overcome these challenges.

Undergraduates in guidance and counselling offer counselling practicum as one of their courses in the department of counsellor education. Counselling practicum is like an internship for some courses in the university. It is like teaching practice where students studying education courses are given the opportunity to practise how to teach, thereby equipping them for the job of teaching before getting into the world of teaching profession (Zakaria, 2013). During the period of teaching practice the student is exposed to the methods and appropriate materials available to teach the lesson (Jekayinfa, 2012). Practicum is a practical-oriented experience-based exercise designed to expose the counsellor- trainee to the practical exercise of their course. Fajonyonmi (2020) noted that counselling practicum is important to counselling practice because it tests and harmonises the skills, techniques, theories and models counsellor-trainees learnt in their exposure to the programme. Counselling practicum enables the counsellor-trainee the opportunity to make use of the measuring instruments such as aptitude test, intelligence test, personality inventory, among others. Practicum exercise gives the counsellor-trainees the opportunity of being exposed to the world of work. Moreover, the secondary school students benefit from practicum exercise because it is an opportunity for students to meet counsellor-trainees one-on-one to discuss challenges such as academic and behavioural problems facing them in the school.

Sometimes, it is believed that practicum exercise by counsellor- trainee is for them to fulfil the requirement of the course, which is more than that because it is a period of learning the rudiments of counselling. Odebode and Adegboyega (2020), noted that guidance and counselling programme in the school is a comprehensive, developmental programme designed to benefit students in their journey through school. Hence, counsellor-trainees impact the lives of the students in the school of their practicum exercise. Counselling practicum also benefits the teachers, supervisors, and counsellors as noted by (Denga, 2007). Practicum exercise is both valuable and indispensable in guidance and counselling programme. The impact is felt on the academic, social, psychological, and emotional life of the students.

Counselling practicum faces a lot of challenges. The challenges might come from the university due to the non-availability of practicum facilities such as standardised instruments, video cameras, among others. Schools used for practicum exercise also create challenges to the exercise. Sometimes school administrators and owners are reluctant to release their students to the counsellors-trainees to interact with them with flimsy excuse that the student counsellors are undergoing training, therefore are not qualified to train their students. According to Oraegbunam (2008), counsellors are not recognized by school principals and majority of school teachers. Merc (2010) observed that most times, student counsellors encounter rivalry from the hosting school counsellor who sees them as a threat. In addition, finance, rigidity, incompetence on the part of the counsellor- trainees are among the problems. (Saricoba, 2010). Gan (2013) equally noted that language barrier poses challenge to practicum. All these problems impact on the ability of the counsellor-trainees to deliver their job effectively. More needs to be done to encourage counsellor- trainees to put in their best during their counselling practicum in schools. This is necessary because some of them take it as a mere exercise, just to pass the course not knowing that it is important for their counselling profession. Practicum prepares student -counsellors for real counselling practice in the near future; the training also teaches them the use of counselling skills, techniques, strategies and counselling theories. Counselling practicum is of paramount importance in the vocational training of student counsellors and other students in general as it prepares them in making the transition from trainees to professionals. Facing lots of challenges during practicum exercise particularly during

the first outing can create fears to counsellor- trainees as observed by Udoh & George, (2014) who noted that first-time practicum students often indicate that they have many fears and worries about their initial counselling practicum experiences.

Statement of the Problem

Undergraduates offering guidance and counselling as a course in the university face problems of fear, incompetence, lack of counselling equipments, acceptance and corporation by the host school among other problems during their counselling practicum that may discourage them from putting in their best in the exercise. Practicum is meant to train counsellor- trainees in the rudiments and the techniques in counselling so that they will succeed in the field when they eventually go into practice as counsellors. This is necessary because some of the counsellor-trainees lack the knowledge of counselling skills, techniques, theories and models particularly application of these theories and models. Counsellor-trainees lack motivation for counselling practicum, they are not well equipped to go for counselling practicum because most of the time their departments are not supportive in terms of provision of necessary counselling equipments to practise with during counselling practicum. These counsellor-trainees are not financially buoyant to secure counselling equipments needed for their practicum and therefore may lose interest in counselling practicum not minding the benefits of the programme. Udoh and George (2014) carried out research on the relevance of counselling practicum in guidance and counselling programme in Nigeria. The findings revealed that the practicum exercise affords the counsellor-trainees the opportunity to access and make use of assessment instruments such as intelligence tests, aptitude tests, personality inventories, and other relevant assessment instruments and techniques. The research also discovered that practicum gives the counsellor-trainee the opportunity to make use of ethics that guide counselling practice. Challenges confronting practicum if not eradicated are bound to impact on the quality of counsellors graduating from universities resulting into half-baked counsellors. This study therefore examined perceived challenges of student counsellor-trainees undertaking counselling practicum among undergraduates of guidance and counselling in the University of Ilorin in Kwara State, Nigeria. It also examined the influence of gender, age and religion on the perception of the respondents on the challenges

of counselling practicum facing student counsellor- trainees among the undergraduates in the University of Ilorin in Kwara State, Nigeria. This is the gap the study was meant to fill.

Research Question

One research question was raised to guide the conduct of the study thus:

What are the perceived challenges facing student counsellor-trainees undertaking counselling practicum among undergraduates of guidance and counselling in the University of Ilorin, Nigeria?

Research Hypotheses

Three hypotheses were formulated and tested in the study

HO₁: *There is no significant difference in the perceived challenges faced by student counsellor-trainees undertaking counselling practicum among undergraduates of guidance and counselling, University of Ilorin, Nigeria based on age.*

HO₂: *There is no significant difference in the perceived challenges faced by student counsellor- trainees undertaking counselling practicum among undergraduates of guidance and counselling, University of Ilorin, Nigeria based on gender.*

HO₃: *There is no significant difference in the perceived challenges faced by student counsellor-trainees undertaking counselling practicum among undergraduates of guidance and counselling, University of Ilorin, Nigeria based on religion.*

Method

This study adopted descriptive survey research design. The population of interest was the undergraduates of University of Ilorin while, target population was students offering guidance and counselling as a programme of study in the University of Ilorin in Kwara State Nigeria. University of Ilorin has student population of about forty thousand. The sample of two hundred undergraduates in guidance and counselling department was selected through multistage sampling method. At stage 1, purposive sampling technique was used to select students from Faculty of Education out of fifteen (15) Faculties in University of Ilorin to participate in the study because guidance and counselling department is in this Faculty. At stage 2, purposive sampling technique was used to select students in guidance and

counselling department. At stage 3, simple random sampling was used to select 200 students to participate. At stage 4, stratified sampling technique was used to group them into gender, age and religion. The instrument for data collection was adapted from Akpochafo (2018) titled “Undergraduates view about Practicum exercise in Guidance and Counselling”. The researchers redesigned the questionnaire with new title, “Challenges of Counselling Practicum Questionnaire (CCPEQ).” The instrument consisted of two parts A and B. Part A sort information on demographic data of the respondents while part B contained 15 items to seek information on the challenges of counselling practicum which was responded to on a four-point Likert-type scale of SA = Strongly agree (4 points), A= Agree (3 points), D= Disagree (2 points) and SA= Strongly disagree (1point). The instrument was validated by experts in measurement and evaluation. Test re-test method of ascertaining reliability was adopted in establishing the reliability of the instrument. Cronbach Alpha was used for analysis of data collected in two administrations after two weeks interval. Reliability co-efficient of 0.74 was obtained which adjudged the instrument reliable for the research. The instrument was scored by finding the mean of the points. This was done by adding the points and diving by 4 to get the mean score thus: $4+3+2+1=10/4 = 2.50$. Decision was that any item in the part B of the questionnaire that scored below 2.50 was not regarded as a challenge of counselling practicum faced by counsellor-trainees while items that scored 2.50 and above were regarded as challenges to counselling practicum among the students. Data collected for the study was analysed with mean and rank order, t-test and analysis of variance. The research question was analysed with percentages, mean and standard deviation were used to analyse the research question, t-test was used to test hypotheses 1 and 2 and Analysis of variance was used to test hypothesis 3. Hypotheses were tested at 0.05 alpha level.

Results

Demographic characteristics of respondents

Table 1: Percentage Distribution of Respondents Based on Age, Gender and Religion

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
<i>Age</i>		
Below 21 years of	95	47.5
22 years and above	105	52.5
Total	200	100
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	90	45.0
Female	110	55.0
Total	200	100
<i>Religion</i>		
Christianity	89	44.5
Islam	105	55.5
African traditional religion	06	3.0
Total	200	100.0

Table 1 shows the distribution of respondents by age, gender and religion. The table shows that 95 (47.5%) of the respondents were 21 years and below while 105 (52.5%) were 22 years of age and above. The table also showed that 90(45.0) are male and 110(55.0%) are female and on religion, 89(44.5%) are Christians, 105(55.5%) are practising Islamic religion.

Research Question: What are the perceived challenges facing student counsellor-trainees undertaking counselling practicum among undergraduates of guidance and counselling in the University of Ilorin, Nigeria?

Table 2: Mean and Rank Order on the Perception of Respondents on Challenges Faced by Student Counsellor-Trainees During Counselling Practicum

Item	Statement	<i>M</i>	Rank
5	Display of initial anxiety by students	3.5	1st
11	Schools not allowing counsellor trainees to record activities	3.34	2nd
8	Lack of cooperation of the school authorities during practicum	3.32	3rd
10	School authority doubts the ability of the counsellor trainee	3.21	4th
14	Inadequate facilities for practicum work	3.19	5th
2	Inappropriate application of basic counselling skills in real life practice	3.17	6th
3	Inability to synthesize and apply basic counselling concepts	3.07	7th
13	Hostility of some school administrators to trainee-counsellors	3.06	8th
20	Lack of counselling skills and techniques	3.02	9th
12	Some school management sees student counsellors as teaching practice students	3.01	10th
1	Lack of adequate classrooms for practicum	2.93	11th
18	Combining practicum exercise with other academic work	2.89	12th
4	Inability to use counselling skills to meet divers client needs	2.86	13th
9	Some school managements are not supportive to practicum exercise activities	2.84	14th
15	Lack of adequate financial support from university	2.83	15th
7	Counsellor trainees fear of operating outside ethics of counselling profession	2.73	16th

Item	Statement	<i>M</i>	Rank
17	Some students in secondary schools refuse to be involved in Practicum exercise	2.73	16th
19	Secondary school students' dislike for counselling practicum	2.69	18th
16	Students being unaware of the importance of counselling practicum	2.45	19th
6	Cultural barrier in application of counselling skills	2.23	20th

Note. The benchmark mean was 2.50; items with mean scores of 2.50 or higher were regarded as challenges.

Table 2 showed that all the items except items 6 and 16 have mean scores that are 2.50 and above, showing that they are within the bench mark of 2.50. This indicates that these items are regarded as challenges faced by student counsellor-trainees during counselling practicum. Items 6 and 16 are regarded least of the challenges of counselling practicum because their mean score of 2.45 and 2.23 respectively are below the bench mark.

Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis One: There is no significant difference in the perceived challenges faced by student counsellor-trainees undertaking counselling practicum among undergraduates of guidance and counselling, University of Ilorin, Nigeria based on age.

Table 3: Mean, Standard Deviation, and t Value of the Respondents' Challenges of Counselling Practicum Based on Age

Age	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Below 21 years	95	22.958	2.196	198	1.814	0.071
22 years and above	105	22.452	2.248			

Table 3 shows that the calculated t-value of 1.814 with a corresponding p-value of .071 greater than .05 level of significance.

Since p-value is greater than the .05 alpha level, the null hypothesis is not rejected. This indicates that there is no significant difference in the challenges faced by student counsellor-trainees undertaking counselling practicum among undergraduates of University of Ilorin based on age.

Hypothesis Two: *There is no significant difference in the perceived challenges faced by student counsellor-trainees undertaking counselling practicum among undergraduates of guidance and counselling, University of Ilorin, Nigeria based on gender.*

Table 4: Mean and Standard Deviation and t-Test of the Perceived Challenges of Counselling Practicum Based on Gender

Gender	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Male	50	26.044	1.896	198	2.29	0.023
Female	110	25.400	2.042			

Table 4 shows that the calculated t-value of 2.29 with a corresponding p-value of .023 which is less than .05 level of significance. Since p-value is lesser than the .05 level of significance, the null hypothesis is therefore rejected. This indicates that there is a significant difference in the challenges of counselling practicum among the undergraduates based on gender.

Hypothesis Three: *There is no significant difference in the perceived challenges faced by student counsellor-trainees undertaking counselling practicum among undergraduates of guidance and counselling, University of Ilorin, Nigeria based on religion.*

Table 5: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Showing Respondents' Perceived Challenges of Counselling Practicum Based on Religion

Source	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Between group	12.218	2	6.209	1.54	.213
Within group	782.562	197	3.972		
Total	794.78	199			

Table 5 shows the calculated F-ratio is 1.538 and p-value is .217. Since the p-value of .217 is greater than .05 level of significance, the null hypothesis is not rejected. Hence, there is no significance

difference in the perceived challenges of counselling practicum as expressed by the respondents based on religion. This means the religion of the respondents did not make them have differing expression on the challenges of counselling practicum.

Discussion of findings

The findings from research question one revealed that the perceived challenges of counselling practicum of the respondents are: display of initial anxiety, private schools not allowing recording of the students, feeling of nervousness in attending to the students, lack of adequate knowledge of counselling skills, not knowing how to make use of counselling skills, among other challenges. This finding is in tandem with (Udoh, 2014) who noted that students shy away from opening up to the counsellor trainees in practicum exercise due to doubt of counsellors-in-training confidentiality and therefore feel insecure discussing their concerns to counsellor trainees. Consistent with the finding is Sarah (2015) who worked on the attitude of students towards teaching practicum in Nigeria. The result of the study shows that students have negative attitude towards practicum exercise in their school.

The result obtained from testing hypothesis one indicated that there is no significance difference in the perceived challenges of counselling practicum among the respondents based on age. The finding might be so because despite the ages of the respondents they face the same or similar challenges in counselling practicum. Modo (2018) corroborated with this finding because his research on the same topic in another locale found no significant difference in the challenges experienced by practicum students based on their age. This means that no matter the age of the students, practicum problems will still be encountered. Difference will only be made when the counsellor trainees are adequately taught on counselling practicum. Many a time, trainees are not well taught on how to do the practicum in their school of posting.

The finding from testing the second hypothesis revealed that there is a significant difference in the perceived challenges of counselling practicum based on gender. This could be as a result of the fact that universities operate co-educational practice, hence both gender are taught together in a class. Hence any failure to teach the students well on counselling practicum will affect all of them irrespective of gender. Therefore, this will become a challenge when they go out on

practicum. However, this finding negates Akpochafo (2018) that found no significant difference between the views of male and female counsellor trainees about the practicum exercise. The same vein, the research of Modo (2018) shows that sex of the students does not differ based on the challenges encountered during practicum among students in University of Uyo. However, the findings of William (2013) in a similar research on the perceived roles and functions of school counsellors supported the result of this research because the research showed that gender and age made the respondents differ in their perception on the roles and functions of school counsellors.

Further finding revealed no significance difference in the perceived challenges of counselling practicum as expressed by the respondents based on religion. This implies that the respondents' religion did not make them differ in the challenges of counselling practicum. The finding might be so because all students irrespective of religion are taught together, if they are not well taught in their practicum class it will affect all of them during their practicum exercise which impact on their attitude towards practicum. Pickens (2005) noted that attitude helps to define one's perception to certain situations. This is why Maliki (2013) stated that the belief someone has about any particular job determines the success of that person in the profession.

Conclusion

The study investigated perceived challenges of Counselling practicum among undergraduates of guidance and counselling in the University of Ilorin. It is concluded that the counsellor-trainees face challenges during the counselling practicum. The respondents expressed that the challenges include but not limited to the followings: display of initial anxiety, some private schools not allowing recording of the exercise in their schools, some students not cooperating with counsellor -trainee students, students doubt about counsellor trainees' ability, lack of adequate facilities for proper recording during counselling practicum, inappropriate application of basic counselling skills in real life, among other challenges. The findings also showed there were no significant differences in the perceived challenges of counsellor- trainees undertaking counselling practicum based on age and religion but there was significant difference based on gender. The last sentence implies that age and religion of the respondents did not make them have different perception on the challenges faced by

counsellor-trainees during counselling practicum, however gender influence their perceptions.

Recommendations

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

- Lecturers should endeavour to teach practicum courses well to the students so that they can effectively discharge their duties during counselling practicum in secondary schools.
- Secondary school administrators should be sensitised on the importance of counselling practicum exercise to their students so as to allow counsellor- trainees to do their counselling practicum effectively.
- Students Counsellor- Trainees need to be actively trained on proper application of basic counselling skills in real life during counselling practicum programme by their lecturers.
- University of Ilorin in Kwara State should equip department of guidance and counselling with necessary equipments for practicum so that students will adequately train for counseling.
- The Department of Guidance Counselling in the universities should introduce micro-skills training, for counsellor- trainees.

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