

Counsellor Trainees' Views about Practicum Exercises in the Guidance and Counselling Programme of the Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria

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Received: January 10, 2018

Accepted: March 1, 2018

Online Published: June 28, 2018

doi:10.5539/ies.v11n7p179

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5539/ies.v11n7p179>

Abstract

The study investigated counsellor trainees' views of practicum exercise in Guidance and Counselling programme in Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria. To guide the study, four research questions were raised and one hypothesis formulated. The study is a descriptive survey which utilized the ex-post facto design. The population was made up of all guidance and counselling students who had done the practicum exercise in the 2017 Sandwich contact. A sample of 35 students was used and this was drawn using purposive sampling technique. The instrument used for data collection was the questionnaire which was valid and had a reliability index of 0.74. The data was analysed using mean, standard deviation and t-test for the hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that students gained competencies during the period, had positive view about their supervisor but suggested that supervisors should come more than once. Moreover, the students enjoyed the support of the school counsellor and the school head. On duration, the study revealed that the period was too short. The study recommends among others for extension of the practicum exercise period and also for supervisors to visit more than once.

Keywords: competencies, duration, Practicum exercise, supervisors, undergraduates

1. Introduction

Guidance and counselling is very vital in the different levels of the educational system as it signifies the important roles of counsellors be it primary, secondary or tertiary levels or in non-school settings. Counsellors provide educational, vocational and personal-social counselling to enable individuals adjust properly. The lofty goals of education are achievable with the assistance of trained counsellors.

An aspect of training that enhances the competency of counsellors is the practicum exercise. Nsisong and Ime (2014) defines practicum as an exercise in which counsellor trainees translate the techniques, theoretical skills and organizational strategies into practice in a school and non-school setting under close supervision. Practicum can be seen as a practical experience well supervised that affords students the opportunity to build and develop basic counselling skills and integrate professional knowledge (Mohamad, 2013). Practicum is an internship exercise where the counsellor trainees are given the opportunity to practice what they have learnt in school. Practicum is similar to internship that obtains in other profession like Medicine, Law, Engineering, Nursing and others. Hence, Bernard and Goodyear (2004) opined that the practice of skills in clinical settings is seen as a crucial requirement for the development of professional competitiveness. Okobiah (2005) argued that the aim of practicum is for the counsellor-in-training to be exposed to real life situation of their profession under the guidance of their supervisor.

She outlined the goals of practicum as follows:

- i. to expose the counsellor in training to the world of work;
- ii. to help counsellors in training to acquire counselling skills in real life situation; and
- iii. to expose the trainees to the realities of counselling profession in many areas.

The practicum exercise duration varies from one country to another. In Nigeria, it spans between six weeks and twelve weeks and at the Delta State University, the practicum exercise runs for six weeks. The counsellor trainees are expected to counsel students, fill the logbooks, make transcription of a case and organize seminar on any

relevant topic. Within this period, lecturers are expected to visit the students and turn in their assessment. No doubt, the practicum period is not an easy one. The various theories of psychodynamic, client centred, trait and factors, rational emotive, eclectic and skills like listening skills, exploration skills, reflection, evaluation, summarizing skills, termination skills, evaluative skills are to be put into practice during this period. This made Rebekah and Badley (2013) to assert that the practicum period can be tasking. Burant and Kirby (2002) are of the view that except there are good plans of how to promote the various skills then practicum can be an exercise in futility. The essence of practicum is to gain competencies hence Falender and Shafrankse (2007) assert that the main source of competence acquisition is effective performance of skills. During practicum the students are expected to master the following skills and competencies: Listening, empathy, responding, interpreting, reflection, confronting, restatement, silence, assuring, immediacy, clarification, summarizing so on. It is expected that through the practicum exercise they have opportunity of practicing the skills they have learnt thereby gaining competency. This certainly is not always the case hence according to Supervision Report (2011) in Malaysia, students were not able to master the aspects of counselling and the report says it is alarming. In Kenya, according to Misigo (2014), graduate counsellors found it difficult to counsel clients when presented with problems they were not familiar with. Deviating from this, Mansor and Yusoff (2013) study revealed that by the close of practicum, the counsellor trainees reported that they had gained useful experiences. On the other hand, Onworah (2010) feels the training given to counsellor trainee is doubtful and says the practical aspect is not challenging enough.

Supervision is another important aspect of practicum. During practicum, there must be good supervision by lecturers from the University to ascertain if counsellor trainees are operating as expected and to help them where there are challenges. This made Meyers (2014) to insist that supervisors should give clear feedback and this is possible when there is close supervision. She maintains that the only thing that can prepare counsellors for what they will encounter in their professional growth is effective supervision. It is equally important that in the setting of practice, that counsellor trainee should get support from the counsellor in the place of practice or the unit head. Without good support the counsellor in training might not exhibit the desired traits and skills.

The central issue therefore is the lack of competencies mentioned above about counsellor trainees; could the lack of competencies be as a result of the programme not being well structured and organized? Another poser is what are undergraduates' view about the practicum exercise especially at the Delta State University, Abraka?

Looking at the different issues, scenarios, practices and especially the complaints from counsellor trainees, one feels there should be a restructuring of practicum practices. If this is to be done, one needs to get the views of the counsellor trainees on various aspects of the practicum so that it largely agrees with global best practices in internship. Could there be sex differences in the views of trainees? Why the views of counsellor trainees? They are the ones to be edified by the practicum and since "they wear the shoe, they know where it pinches." They could have some of the solutions as to how to make it better. The question to be answered therefore is "what are the views of counsellor trainees on how practicum exercises are organized and how they can become more beneficial?"

Although there is Nisony and Ime's work on relevance of counselling in Nigeria, Dimkpa's (2015) work on comparison of counselling education programme in South-South Universities, Gothard and Bojuwoye (1992) on counselling training in two different cultures but none on the Delta University, Abraka. In short there is dearth of materials on this topic which makes the study very important. The outcome will be of immense benefit to counsellors, students and administrative heads; and the society in general. It is hoped that with the training counsellors trainees will become better counsellors who will assist the society through the remoulding of teenagers in secondary schools.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to find out counsellor trainees' views about the practicum exercise in Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria.

Specifically, the study investigated the following:

- i. skill and competencies acquired during practicum
- ii. duration of the programme
- iii. counsellor trainees' view about the supervision
- iv. counsellor trainees' view on the support from counsellors or unit heads

1.2 Research Questions

The following research questions were asked to guide the study.

- 1) To what extent do counsellor trainees' acquire desired skill and competencies during the practicum exercise?

- 2) To what extent does the time allocated for practicum exercise able to achieve the aims of the exercise?
- 3) What are the counsellor trainees' views about lecturers' supervision?
- 4) What are the trainees' views about the support they received from the heads of their units?
- 5) What is the difference between the views of male and female undergraduates about the practicum exercise?

1.3 Hypothesis

One hypothesis was formulated for this study:

There is no significant difference between the views of male and female undergraduates about the practicum exercise.

1.4 Theoretical Framework

This work is anchored on Situated Learning theory (SLT) by Lave and Wenger (1991). The theory describes how professional skills are acquired by individuals expanding work on apprenticeship and how legitimate peripheral participation leads to eventual membership in a community of practice. Hank (1991) sees situated learning theory focus as the relationship between learning and the social situation. The theory is important in that it brings about relationship between classroom situations and real life outside the classroom. Practicum exercise is hinged on this theory because counsellor trainees have been taught theories, techniques and skills in the classroom and during practicum they are expected to practicalize these in school and non-school setting and that is the real life outside the classroom. Moreover, in situated learning approach, new comers (that is counsellor trainees) start learning by observing members of the community, get associated with the practice and gradually the trainee counsellor moves from the stage of observation which is periphery to full participation, that is, assuming the role of the expert which is the counsellor.

2. Methods and Procedures

2.1 Design

This study is a descriptive survey which utilized the ex-post facto design. The study fits this design since data was collected from counsellor trainees who had undergone the practicum exercise.

2.2 Population

The population comprised all 600 level students of the Department of Guidance and Counselling, Delta State University, Abraka, 2017 Sandwich contact. The number is 45

2.3 Sample and Sampling Technique

The sample was made up of 35 final year students in 2017 Sandwich contact. The technique used was purposive sampling. All the students were to be used but on the day of administering the instrument, only 35 were present due to heavy rain.

2.4 Instrument

The instrument for data collection was the questionnaire titled "undergraduate views about practicum exercise in Guidance and Counselling." The instrument was made up of 24 items to be responded to on a four-point scale of SD, D, A, SA. The instrument was made up of two sections. The first was for demographic information on gender and practicum setting. The second section was made up of sub sections A, B, C and D. section A was made up of six items eliciting information on competency acquired during the practicum exercise. Section B was made up of eight items to gather information on counsellor trainees' view about their supervisor. Section C consisted of seven items demanding information about support from their heads and Section D was made up five questions on duration of practicum exercise. The last question had to do with any other comment, that is, students were free to air their views on any issue not covered by the instrument.

Reliability of the instrument was got by using the Cronbach alpha method which yielded a coefficient value of 0.74. This value signifies that the instrument was reliable for use. The validity of the instrument was established by experts in Measurement and Evaluation in the Department of Guidance and Counselling of the University. The conclusion was that the instrument was valid and measuring what it sets out to measure. The instrument was personally administered to the students and all the 35 were retrieved.

2.5 Method of Data Analysis

The analysis was done using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions and t-test for the hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance. The cut-off point for the research question was 2.50. Based on this, items with a mean score lower than 2.50 were regarded as negative and items with a mean score of 2.50 and above were

positive.

2.6 Presentation of Data

Table 1. Mean and standard deviation of competencies gained during practicum exercise

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Remark
1.	Practicum exercise enabled me to practice the skills I was taught.	3.82	0.38	Positive
2.	Practicum enabled me to understand my courses more.	3.51	0.61	Positive
3.	As a result of the practicum, I was able to apply the right theories and techniques in solving counsellor's problems.	3.14	0.55	Positive
4.	The guidance and counselling courses taught at school prepared me for the practicum exercise.	3.25	0.70	Positive
5.	During the practicum, I was able to note students who need counselling and I made myself available to them.	3.51	0.56	Positive
6.	The practicum assisted me in building self confidence.	3.60	0.49	Positive

From the table above, it can be seen that items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 were above the cut-off point of 2.50. This indicates a high degree of competencies gained.

Table 2. Counsellor Trainees' views about their supervisors

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Remark
1.	I am comfortable with the supervisor's procedures in assessing me.	3.23	0.73	Positive
2.	I was given a clear feedback by my supervisor.	3.02	0.74	Positive
3.	My supervisor's assessment was fair.	3.11	0.79	Positive
4.	When I have difficulties I consulted with my supervisor.	2.48	0.95	Negative
5.	My supervisor came once to supervise me.	2.88	0.96	Positive
6.	My supervisor encouraged me.	2.91	0.87	Positive
7.	My supervisor was willing to listen to my observations and suggestions.	3.00	0.80	Positive

The data in Table 2 showed the mean value of all items being more than the cut-off point of 2.50 except item 4 with a mean value of 2.48. Though item 4 was not up to 2.50 the cut-off point but overall analysis revealed that counsellor trainees had positive view about their supervisors.

Table 3. Counsellor Trainees' views about support from resident supervisor/head

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Remark
1.	The counsellor/head of the unit where I did my practicum were supportive.	3.17	0.85	
2.	Resident head assisted by giving me enough guidance	2.97	0.92	
3.	They discussed my counselling sessions with me.	2.82	0.98	
4.	I discussed with my supervisor difficult cases I could not handle.	2.80	0.86	
5.	I had cordial relationship with my school counsellor / unit head.	2.97	0.95	
6.	They had no time for the practicum exercise.	3.45	0.78	

Table 3 indicates a mean value higher than the cut-off point of 2.50, the analysis indicates that counsellor trainees are of the view that they received support from their resident heads.

Table 4. Counsellor Trainees' views about duration of the practicum exercise

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Remark
1.	The time for the practicum exercise was too short.	3.02	0.84	
2.	The time is not long enough to acquire the desired skills.	3.10	0.86	
3.	The students do not come for counselling.	2.04	0.96	
4.	The students were not interested in the practicum exercise.	2.16	0.94	
5.	The time for students to visit the counsellor is not there.	2.34	0.96	

The data in Table 4 indicates that the first two items were above the 2.50 cut-off mark. This implies that the duration of the exercise was too short. For items 3 and 4 the mean values were below 2.50 cut-off point showing that students were not interested in the practicum exercise and do not come for counselling. Moreover item 5 showed that there was no time to visit the counsellor with a mean of 2.34.

Table 5. Means and Standard deviation on the views of male and female undergraduates about the practicum exercise

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Mean difference (MD)	Std Error Difference	95% confidence interv. of the difference.	
Male	16	80.38	5.18				
Female	19	85.58	4.96	-5.20	1.72	-8.70	-1.71

Table 5 revealed that there exist negative differences between male and female undergraduate views about the practicum exercise in the University. The mean difference of -5.20 between male and female was shown in the table with the standard error difference of 1.72 and 95% confidence interval of the difference showing the lower bound of -8.70 and upper bound of -1.71. However, this could be as a result of the fact that counsellor trainees experience the same environment, supervisors, support from school heads and duration of practicum exercise.

Table 6. T-test analysis on the views of male and female counsellor trainees about practicum exercise

Variable	N	X	SD	DF	t-cal	t-crit.	Sig.
Male	16	80.37	5.17526				
Female	19	85.57	4.95890	33	-3.032		.876

Table 6 showed the t-calculated value of -3.032 and p-value of 0.875 testing the hypothesis at an alpha level of 0.05, the p-value of 0.876 was greater than the alpha level of 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference between the views of male and female undergraduates' counsellor trainees about the practicum exercise was accepted or retained. This implies that there was no significant difference between the views of male and female counsellor trainees about the practicum exercise.

3. Findings

From the counsellor trainees' comments on the last item which allowed them to freely comment on the exercise, the following verbatim comments were gathered.

- 1) The candidate commented that the practicum practice is good but lecturers have to teach them well before going for the practicum exercise.
- 2) Micro practicum exercise should be carried out in the University before going to practice outside.
- 3) Counsellor in training should be well exposed to practical administration of inventories, rating scales and other psychological test instruments.
- 4) Lecturers should be more practical in their teaching and should try to include micro practicum when discussing skills and theories.
- 5) Committee should display supervisors list in order for students to relate well with them and demand for assistance.
- 6) Supervisors should visit more than once and not wait for seminar day but visit before the seminar day.
- 7) Lecturers should try to visit students at least every two or three weeks to make students to be serious and be at the practicum setting.
- 8) Organisers should reconcile with the school before sending students for practicum to avoid being rejected.
- 9) No office for the counsellor trainee in the school of practice.
- 10) Unit head assisted immensely.
- 11) It will be good if the duration of the practicum is extended. The time is too short.
- 12) No time for counselling in the school time table but was done during break.

4. Discussion of Findings

The findings from research question one on competencies indicated that students gained competencies in the sense that the exercise enabled them to practice counselling skills and techniques taught, master the right theories and techniques in solving counselees' problems and gained self-confidence. This finding is in agreement with Misigo (2014) whose study revealed that the practicum exercise gave counsellor trainees the chance to practice the theories and principles that had been taught. This is what practicum is about, that is, allowing students to practice what has been learnt.

All these are equally supported by Mansor and Yusoff (2013) finding which revealed that by the close of practicum the counsellor trainees reported that they had gained useful experiences. Falender and Shafrankse (2007) also agreed that when students are able to perform skills, it is a key source of competence.

The finding however disagrees with Supervision Report (2011) in Malaysia which reported that students were unable to master the aspects of counselling. Some of the free comments from the counsellor trainees are as follows; one, the practice is good but lecturers have to teach them well before going for the practicum; two, that micro practicum exercise should be carried out in the University before going out for practice; three, that lecturers should be more practical in their teaching and should try to include micro practicum when discussing skills and theories. These comments showed that lecturers have to be more practical in their approach so that when students go out for practicum they are better equipped.

The second finding about supervisors from the University revealed that students have a positive view about their supervisors though from the free comments, students would prefer that supervisors visited more than once instead of waiting for the seminar day. These comments are supported by Meyers (2014) who is of the view that supervisors should give clear feedback and this is possible when there is close supervision. No doubt close supervision entails more than just visiting the schools once.

The findings on the duration of practicum showed that the time allocated for it was too short for students to acquire the desired skills. The free comments from the students equally supported this. They advocated longer period for the practicum to allow for more experience. This finding is not supported by what is obtained in some other places. According to Moore (2014) practicum runs for nine months in Texas University; while in the University of Malaysia Terrengganu, it runs for six (6) months (Zakaria, 2013). The findings on support from school counsellors and school heads revealed that they were supportive. From the students' free comments; they confirmed the support from school officials. This finding is in agreement with Misigo (2014) whose study confirmed that trainee counsellors received a lot of support from the school management.

Other issues arising from the students' free comments includes the fact that there is no time scheduled for counselling on the school time table, and that there are no offices for the counsellor trainees. Certainly, these will affect negatively the practice of guidance and counselling in the schools.

Finally, the finding based on the hypothesis revealed that there was no significant difference between male and female students in their response to their views about the practicum exercise.

5. Conclusion

Based on the above findings and discussions, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- i. Counsellor trainees gained competencies during their practicum exercise but insisted that there should be micro practicum before going out.
- ii. Counsellor trainees had positive views about their supervisors.
- iii. The duration of practicum exercise was short.
- iv. Counsellor trainees received support from the resident counsellor and school heads.
- v. No time for counselling on the school time table and so counselling was done during break time.
- vi. Male and female counsellor trainees do not differ in their views about practicum exercise in the Delta State University.

6. Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations have been made.

- 1) The Department of Guidance and Counselling should endeavour to organise micro practicum for students before sending them out for outside practice. Moreover in teaching skills and theories, the lecturers concerned should include more practicals, that is, the courses should be practical oriented.

- 2) The University and the departments should ensure that students are visited more than once in their practicum location.
- 3) The Ministry of Education should be persuaded so that Guidance and Counselling should be included on the school time table.
- 4) The Counselling Association of Nigeria (CASSON) should partner with the National Universities Commission (NUC) and Heads of tertiary institutions so that the duration of practicum can be elongated to give students time to acquire the desired skills.
- 5) The Planning Committee for the practicum in the University should liaise properly with schools and non-school settings so that students are not turned back for one reason or the other.

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