

A COMPARISON OF COUNSELLOR EDUCATION PROGRAMMES IN TWO UNIVERSITIES IN SOUTH-SOUTH NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: *This paper discusses the training patterns of two universities running counsellor education programmes in South-South Nigeria. The purpose was to compare whether the programmes offered in these universities were the same or different, and their relevance in meeting the needs of the people. This has become pertinent due to the role of counselling in modifying maladaptive behaviour, which is posing a threat to the educational system in Nigeria. The areas of comparison include: the admission policy, course contents, methods of training, academic staff quality and staff development as well as availability of facilities for the programmes. The analysis revealed that there were similarities between the counsellor training programmes of both universities in terms of admission policy and entry requirements, academic staff quality/staff development and methods of training using lectures and practicum. However, differences were found in their course contents, credit hour allocations and facilities, in which the programmes from the University of Port Harcourt were more diversified in meeting the needs of the society than that of the Niger Delta University as at the period of this research. Although both were involved in practicum, too much emphasis was placed on theory with little practical knowledge and skills in both universities.. This can be attributed to the way that counsellor educators themselves were taught in the various universities where they graduated. It was recommended that the Counselling Association of Nigeria should evolve a professional enhancement programme for its members in addition to the government offering sponsorship for counsellor educators to visit other universities outside Nigeria in an exchange programme in order to gain adequate practical experience, ensure programme uniformity and ensure the provision of better facilities by the government for counsellor training. Others include the extension of the period of practicum and requesting TETFUND assistance in training/re-training of counsellor educators.*

KEYWORDS: counsellor education, programme uniformity, in-service training, practical skills, Universities

INTRODUCTION

Guidance and counselling as a programme of study has existed for more than three decades in Nigeria after its introduction in 1976. While guidance is a service aimed at enabling the individual achieve proper functioning with regards to his/her characteristics and needs, counselling is considered as a process in which a counsellor assists a client in facilitating growth, development and positive change in various dimensions, including social, educational, vocational, emotional

and moral development (Makinde, 1987). Thus, guidance and counselling is a process of helping an individual become fully aware of himself and the way in which he is responding to the influences of his environment (Akinade, 2012).

The context in which guidance and counselling became necessary in Nigeria was to ensure the success of students at the end of their secondary school education. Hence, counsellors were trained to assist the students with their career decisions, tackle problems involved in their transition from junior to senior secondary school; with the task of conducting orientation programmes, remediation, academic counselling, placement and referral services (Akinade, Sokan & Osarenren, 1996). According to Aluede, Afen-Kpaida and Adomeh (2004), counselling at non-school setting and private practices are quite rare in Nigeria. Therefore, guidance and counselling programme has remained isolated from other human services such as psychology, social work and sociology (Aluede et. al, 2004).

A comparative analysis of the counsellor education programmes in the University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State and the Niger Delta University, Bayelsa State both in South-South Nigeria had become necessary in part as a result of the need to address the academic achievement needs of the students and lecturers as well as extending the services to the communities where it is practiced so that we can have well adjusted individuals capable of helping themselves and others. It is also based on the researcher's experience in teaching some courses in this discipline, where there were observable differences in the background and quality of the teachers themselves as well as in the quality of ideas shared between and amongst colleagues while involved in team teaching. Others included evaluating the innovations the programme had introduced since its commencement more than three decades ago. Moreover, Nigeria is passing through some terrible times in its educational, social and political scenes in which counsellor education programme should expand to fill some of the gaps created so that these emerging problems can be adequately contained in order for her to realize its vision and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by the year 2020.

In view of the foregoing, the objectives of this research were to find out if counsellor education programmes in the two universities were similar or different, and whether the programmes (i.e the content of the courses) offered were capable of meeting the needs of the citizenry, especially in the light of the observation made that 'there is a dearth in programme uniformity and integration from one university to the other in Nigeria (Okocha & Alika, 2012). Furthermore, the comparison of the two universities had become necessary in view of the fact that both institutions have similar cultural/ethnic background in terms of language, standard of living, economic, physical and political heritage, amongst others. Hence this analysis was made using some criteria, notably admission policy, staff quality, method of training, etc.

Rationale for Guidance and Counselling in Nigeria Educational System

The need for guidance and counselling in Nigeria was borne out of the Federal Government's observation that many of its youths were ignorant in certain vocational areas, and were experiencing personality maladjustment. The National Policy on Education therefore, made provisions for the training of interested teachers in guidance and counseling to fulfill this purpose. It also ensured that guidance and counselling featured in teacher education programmes (Federal

Government of Nigeria, 1981). The recognition of this programme as being important in meeting the needs of the students in particular made the government to emphasize the objectives of its policy as follows:

- Respect for the worth and dignity of the individual;
- Faith in man's ability to make vocational decisions;
- Moral and spiritual values in inter and intra personal human relations;
- Shared responsibility for the common good of society;
- Respect for the dignity of labour; and
- Promotion of the emotional, physical and psychological health of all children.
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In furtherance of the need for guidance and counselling in the schools, Umoh (1998) observed that repeated changes in the education system, unrest in the universities and other tertiary institutions, problem of national integration, changes in home and family life as well as the problem of cultism in the schools made it possible for the inclusion of guidance and counselling in the school curriculum.

Methods of Training: Undergraduate Programmes

The analysis of the undergraduate programmes of the two universities were discussed using the following criteria:

Admission Policy and Entry Requirements:

The entry requirements of the two universities were similar. These were as specified by the universities. The requirements for the degree programme included five credit passes at the Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE), General Certificate Examination (GCE) and the National Examination Council (NECO), at not more than two sittings. This was in addition to having credit passes in English Language and Mathematics which were considered to be compulsory for all courses. In the same vein, the intending students must have an acceptable pass in the Joint Matriculation Examination (JME) to qualify them to write a Post University Matriculation Examination (PUME). The latter is a screening test to select the successful candidates and it is conducted by the universities. Also, the duration of both undergraduate programmes in the Niger Delta University and the University of Port-Harcourt is four years.

In spite of their similarities, there were also differences in the sense that the degree certificate awarded to the students at the end of their programme was slightly different. For instance, whereas the undergraduate guidance and counselling programme of the University of Port-Harcourt was geared towards training undergraduates in a four year programme leading to the award of Bachelor of Science in Education/Counselling Psychology without a teaching subject, that of the Niger Delta University was focused on a four year degree course leading to the award of Bachelor of Education in Guidance and Counselling with options in teaching subjects as Economics, Political Science, Geography, Mathematics, English and Literary Studies, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, and Religious Studies. Furthermore, the University of Port Harcourt groomed their counsellors in training for the secondary schools, Colleges of Education, industrial establishments, social welfare

and other social agencies, in which the students combined counsellor training with psychology to enable them specialize in professional areas such as Psychology, Measurement and Evaluation, Personnel, Vocational Information, Family, Marriage, Career and Rehabilitation counselling, which were broad in focus. Conversely, the Niger Delta University tailored its programmes towards training counsellors specifically for the secondary schools, which was and is still the original intention of the government. However, this tends to narrow the graduates' knowledge as well as interest in particular areas.

Course Contents and Credit Hour Allocation

Although there seem to be more similarities in terms of the course contents of the two universities, in almost every aspect of psychology and counselling, the University of Port-Harcourt had some specific courses which were not offered in the Niger Delta University. These were but not limited to the following selected courses as at the time of this investigation:

- Introduction to Health Psychology;
- Psychology in Addictive Behaviour and Counselling;
- Physiological Psychology;
- Psychology of Stress Management in Social Settings; and
- Industrial Psychology.

It should be noted that all the courses taught were studied along with core education courses as well as general studies. A close examination of the courses showed that the University of Port-Harcourt had more courses tailored towards almost every field of human endeavour, where the ideas gained from these courses could be put into good use, in hospital settings, National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), Armed Forces, only to mention a few. In other words, these were geared towards meeting societal needs. The ratio of counselling courses to other education courses was 3:4 in the first semester of 100 Level, that is three counselling courses to four others in education. Whereas in the Niger Delta University, there seem to be more education than counselling courses in the first semester of the same level. This showed that the concentration of courses were mainly in the major discipline as observed in the University of Port-Harcourt unlike that of the Niger Delta University. However, some new courses were introduced by the NUC late in the 2013/2014 academic sessions, which the universities have also integrated.

Thus, the programmes have become enriched although more lecturers are needed for effective teaching because some of these courses are in specialized areas where professional input is required. This is so because some of the present educators may not have come across these courses while undergoing their postgraduate training in Nigeria. A close look at the courses showed that some of them are quite relevant to the present situation in which industrial work and other aspects of life have imposed a lot of stress on the citizenry, making them vulnerable to all sorts of problems.

In terms of the total credit hours required for a student to graduate for the four year degree programme, 132 credit hours was required for students of the University of Port-Harcourt as

against 120 credit hours for those in the Niger Delta University. This is a deficit of 12 credit hours. On the other hand, in terms of the course spread per semester, the University of Port-Harcourt had a minimum of 16 and a maximum of 18 credit hours, as against the Niger Delta University with a minimum of 20 and a maximum of 24 credit hours. Although one could compare this along the line of weighting allocated to each course by the universities, with the University of Port-Harcourt allocating 3 credit units to most of its courses, the Niger Delta University had 2 credit units for its courses. In corroboration with this finding, Achebe (1986) mentioned that there was a wide range of variance in the credit hours allocated to the vital experience in its contents from one university to the other in Nigeria.

Academic Staff Quality and Staff Professional Development

In view of the staff quality, both universities were the same, having well trained professionals in counseling, teaching courses in the institutions. However, the University of Port-Harcourt is older in terms of its year of establishment, having graduated several counsellors for more than 30 years who also have become counsellor trainers in other universities across Nigeria. On the contrary, the Niger Delta University had been graduating trained counsellors only 12 years ago. Thus, the quality of staff in terms of the years of experience, could be a measure of the number of years the two universities have existed. More still, the University of Port-Harcourt is owned by the Federal Government whereas the Niger Delta University is state-owned. Therefore, it was expected that these differences were bound to be observed, especially where most of the lecturers in the Niger Delta University were just returning from study fellowship after obtaining their doctoral degrees. Experience have shown that as a result of the changes taking place in terms of new courses introduced by the NUC, it is believed that the present crop of doctoral degree holders may have taken some of the newly introduced courses while in training which is capable of increasing their academic quality. As it stands, the University of Port-Harcourt had a total of 16 academic staff of the discipline whereas the Niger Delta University had a total of 8 academic staff. The breakdown of the academic staff and their rank in the two universities is as shown in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Staff Quality and Quantity in both Universities

S/No.	Staff Rank	University of PH	Niger Delta Univ.
1.	Professor	2	-
2.	Reader	-	3
3.	Senior Lecturer	3	2
4.	Lecturer 1	1	2
5.	Lecturer 11	9	1
6.	Assistant Lecturer	1	-
	Total	16	8

Source: Researcher's Field work, 2014

The breakdown of staff by rank and quality in Table 1 shows that the University of Port-Harcourt had a total of sixteen lecturers in the following categories: Professor (2), Reader (nil), Senior Lecturer (3), lecturer I (1), Lecturer II (9) and Assistant Lecturer (1). Whereas the Niger Delta

University had a total of eight lecturers as follows: Professor (nil), Reader (3), Senior Lecturer (2), Lecturer I (2), Lecturer II (1) and Assistant Lecturer (nil) in the discipline.

In terms of professional development programmes, both universities had fared well, judging from the academic positions occupied by the academic staff as seen earlier in Table 1. It is particularly heart warming to note that the Niger Delta University, with its good leadership drive was able to sponsor most of their academic staff for doctoral degrees inside and outside the shores of Nigeria. This had a positive effect on the quality of their academic staff since over 8 years ago. The result is quite different today from previous finding that trainers differ in terms of professional quality and quantity in which some universities had more masters than doctoral degree lecturers (Achebe, 1986). According to Huber, Hoadley and Wood (2011), professional development is a key factor in ensuring teaching staff are confident in delivery of quality teaching. It is no longer fashionable for professional staff to hold on to ideas of old, when innovation and improvement in terms of knowledge keeps expanding. Professional development provides staff with a range of pedagogical tools for enriching the student experience within their discipline area (Huber, Hoadley & Wood, 2011).

Autonomy of the Counsellor Education Programme

In respect of having autonomy of the programme, the University of Port-Harcourt had a separate Department of Psychology, Guidance and Counselling where the programme was domiciled right from its inception, whereas the Niger Delta University's programme was domiciled in the Department of Educational Foundations. Perhaps the reason for this difference could be due to the quality of academic staff of the discipline at the initial stage when the programme was introduced. It is still not clear why the programme is yet to stand on its own in spite of having qualified teachers as well as running a Post Graduate Diploma in Education. Again, this observation is in line with the submission of Achebe (1986), that in most universities in Nigeria, Curriculum or Foundations section of Education runs programmes for trainee counsellors. The situation ought to have changed by now to bring about growth and development in the universities in order to enable Nigeria achieve its objectives for the MDGs in the nearest future.

Facilities and Infrastructural Quality

Facilities are very important in the training of the modern day counsellor. Unfortunately, underfunding of the universities have been a long standing problem in Nigeria. Thus, it is sad to note that there is little or no difference between the universities although the University of Port-Harcourt had a slight edge over the Niger Delta University which could be attributed to ownership status of the two, that is, the former being owned by the Federal Government of Nigeria. As a result, most of the facilities and materials needed for the training of counsellors such as psychological test kits, 2-way mirror, well equipped counselling/practicum laboratory were deficient in the Niger Delta University. Other infrastructural materials such as adequate lecture rooms, reading room, departmental library, seminar rooms, etc were inadequate. This had been a huge problem which the programme had to contend with. This is to the extent that the programme was scored low in the last accreditation exercise carried out in the 2011/2012 academic sessions by the National Universities Commission mainly due to poor infrastructural quality on one hand and inadequate text books/ currency of journals. Based on this, the programme was given an

interim accreditation status whereas the University of Port Harcourt got full accreditation status for its programmes. Lack of relevant facilities obviously could mean poor quality of graduates in the discipline; whereas one of the major objectives of the programme is to contribute to national development through the advancement and propagation of knowledge for service to the community and humanity.

Knowledge Delivery and Grading System

The main similarity between the two universities was that there was a common purpose in terms of training of counsellors. The method adopted for the delivery of knowledge in the programme for both universities were basically the same. It comprised the theory method of acquisition of knowledge through lectures, reading assignments, and placement in the schools for practicum experience. The aim of such placement was to enable the trainee counsellors gain adequate and relevant knowledge in interpersonal and counselling skills, although in most cases, experience had shown that it was done hastily and the educators carried out supervision less frequently. Perhaps, this could also be the case with other universities in Nigeria. The researcher was of the view that it could be as a result of the poor remuneration of the academic staff by the universities in which supervision allowances were not commensurate with the work done. However, the University of Port-Harcourt may have engaged its students on other forms of field experiences different from placement in schools.

The researcher also observed that counsellor education training programme as per the acquisition of practical knowledge by the students in both universities was rather too short, given the magnitude of the training requirements. For instance, apart from the six weeks practicum training, no further training takes place as far as skills acquisition is concerned. Whereas in Great Britain, for example, Gothard and Bojuwoye (1992) contended that as it pertains to practical/skills training, four elements were evident in the counsellor training course, namely weekly placement, a two or three weeks block attachment, a weekly counselling practicum and a bi-weekly case discussion. Furthermore, in placement which takes place once a week, the students are given a setting that allows them have an on-going case load of clients, which takes place either in college or university, a voluntary organization, a hospital or G.P. practice and it is supervised regularly (Gothard & Bojuwoye, 1992). Unfortunately, experience has shown that this was not the case in both universities under review. This is the reason why the researcher felt that counsellor education programme requires a lengthy period of learning to be able to meet up with the standards obtainable in the developed countries. Learning skills as it were, is very important especially in a profession that deals with diverse needs of humanity, and in which it is absolutely necessary to be an expert in understanding the problems and alternatives available to solving specific problems. This is perhaps why learning is regarded as the mental activity by which knowledge and skills, habits and attitudes, virtues and ideas are acquired, retained and utilized resulting in progressive adoption and modification of conduct and behaviour (Okoye, 2010).

The grading system of students' academic work was also the same for both universities, and this was as dictated by the National Universities Commission. In line with this, the NUC had requested all the universities in Nigeria to review their policies and programmes to conform with the NUC minimum academic standards. In view of this fact, the NUC introduced a new grading system in

which all universities in Nigeria were instructed to abide with in order to step up their academic standard. The old and new grading systems are as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Old and New Grading Systems and Classifications

Old Grading			New Grading		
Mark/Score	Letter Grade	Grade Point	Mark/Score	Letter Grade	Grade Point
70% & above	A	5.00	70% & above	A	5.00
60 – 69	B	4.00	60 – 69	B	4.00
50 – 59	C	3.00	50 – 59	C	2.00
45 – 49	D	2.00	45 – 49	D	1.00
40 – 44	E	0.00	40 – 44	F	0.00
0 – 39	F	-	-	-	-

Source: Researcher's Field work, 2014

The old grading system had been in existence until the implementation of the new grading system which commenced in the 2013/2014 Academic Sessions. Table 2 shows that unlike the old grading system in which the score 40-44 had I point, the new system has no point for that category of score, meaning that the last pass is 45% instead of 40% as was the case previously. This is a welcome development in the sense that it would help the students to study harder since the pass mark has been hiked. Thus, in line with this change, NUC also introduced a change in the order of the final degree classification. At present, third class is the last classification while the pass degree has been phased out.

DISCUSSION

The comparative analysis made between the University of Port-Harcourt and the Niger Delta University in terms of their counsellor education programmes showed that there were minor differences in terms of programme uniformity, i.e course contents, facilities/materials available, allocation of credit hours, only to mention a few. For example, the confirmation of a previous finding by Achebe (1986) on the wide range of credit hours allocation to courses by some universities was still in existence. In terms of the application of the principles and skills learnt, there was no appreciable improvement due to scanty field practices in the universities. However, this finding is quite different from the submissions of Gothard and Bojuwoye (1992), who maintained that both the University of Ilorin, Nigeria and the University of Reading in Britain adopted similar methods of acquisition of knowledge, understanding the values and some theoretical experiences in which more placement activities for practicum was the norm.

In terms of entry requirements and admission policy, staff quality/development, both universities were similar, although there is still room for improvement. This is because development goes with developmental changes, and should also be a continuous process that will go on throughout the

working career of the counsellor educators. In corroboration, Hussain, Sarwar and Anwar (2010) opined that 'on-going professional development of the university staff should be conducted because it cultivates those skills whose application will improve the efficiency and effectiveness with which the anticipated results of a particular organizational segment are achieved. Also, teachers who entered the profession years back or those just coming in cannot do justice to their jobs unless they continue to grow (Hussain et al., 2010).

Although each university had its own policy pertaining to the knowledge it deems necessary for its undergraduates, a cursory look at some of the course contents of the University of Port Harcourt showed that their courses are not restricted to training counsellors for the school system alone, but are broad in focus to accommodate other aspects of human needs. This is very important especially for today's world, and considering the stress that a lot of Nigerians undergo in addition to the unimaginable depression brought about by marriage, economic down turn, unemployment, religious crises, drug and alcohol addiction as well as other related problems. Therefore, this calls for programme review by the National Universities Commission (NUC) and the government so as to meet up with society's challenges.

Counselling Implications

The findings from this research had shown that both universities require an overhauling of their programmes to be in line with best practices as observed in the developed countries such as the United States of America, where counsellor education programmes have been taken to advanced levels, and where counselling has become relevant in every field of human endeavour. Furthermore, experience has shown that the myriad of social ills in Nigeria should make counselling to become more diversified and relevant in solving the problems of people in which sanctions, imprisonment and other forms of punitive measures applied previously have either failed, compounded the problems or tackled them at the peripheral level. Meanwhile, some of the maladaptive behavioural problems can easily be overcome with the application of some psychological therapies/remedies. For example, helping clients by using rational means to understand themselves so that they become more capable of resolving their conflicts.

Therefore, the counselling Association of Nigeria (CASSON) should see this as a wake up call to evolve programmes that will address some of these issues, through group and individual counselling techniques, seminars and conferences involving stake holders at the local, state and federal levels of the government. The association should also use the opportunity to impress on the government the need for the training/retraining and development of the students and their educators. Thus, their duty should comprise a drastic planning and execution of seminars using the period of its annual conference to draw attention to the marked differences observed in counsellor education programmes from one university to the other.

The key points of this evaluation was to make concrete changes in the training (both in theory and practice) necessary for meeting the needs of the trainers and the trainees and to modify their practice. This should translate to quality teaching and building a good learning culture among the students. This calls for more discussions using workshops in curriculum renewal and encouraging further staff professional development. The university authorities should be counselled in realizing

that staff development should not stop after the teachers have acquired a PhD degree, but should be a continuous process. Furthermore, more emphasis should be placed on practical work to make counsellors become more grounded in giving the needed services to the society. In other words, counsellor education programmes should be geared towards the specific needs of the societies where they are practiced.

CONCLUSION

The comparative analysis of the University of Port Harcourt and the Niger Delta University counsellor education programmes showed that there were similarities in terms of the purpose of the programme, admission/entry requirements and quality of academic staff. However, differences were observed in their programme contents, infrastructural facilities, credit hour allocation to courses, only to mention a few. This observation is only a testimony that not much had changed judging from Achebe's (1986) report on certain aspects of the programme especially in its contents and allocation of credit hours. Notwithstanding, more similarities than differences were observed. On the other hand, and in terms of the application of the principles and skills learnt, there was not much improvement observed due to scanty practices by the trainees.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the various issues raised in this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. **Course content Review:** The course contents in both universities should be reviewed critically by the academic heads of the universities, the NUC and the Counselling Association of Nigeria. This is by deliberately unifying counsellor programmes to ensure equal status of counsellors in Nigeria and uniformity of programmes offered in the universities. The universities also have roles to play by organizing seminars for those concerned as a way of addressing the issues involved. There should be a uniform curriculum design and integration of learning technologies for the counsellor education programme. This also includes learning and teaching policies.
2. **Provision of specialized staff/ staff development:** The universities should encourage their academic staff through in-service sponsorship for exchange programmes, by the educators visiting other well established universities within and outside Nigeria, having a plethora of qualified teaching staff. In this way, they can ensure collaboration and exchange of ideas which go a long way in enhancing learning and teaching. It is important for the universities to welcome foreign experts by liaising with other universities abroad in order to learn new knowledge in the field and transmitting same to the students. Much of what counsellor educators acquired over the years may have become obsolete, handed down from the inventors of the programmes, who have themselves made more progress by devising better methods of training. Staff development would give teachers the opportunity of learning latest techniques of teaching and research. The universities should make good use of the TETFUND scholarship in terms of staff development, which is especially important in enhancing learning and teaching

3. **Knowledge Acquisition:** The universities should place more emphasis on practical knowledge in addition to the theoretical aspect. This is because the educational system depends more on theory with little practical application of knowledge. The period of practicum experience should be extended beyond the current six weeks per semester and the ratio of counselling courses to others should be higher to provide sufficient time for the students to improve or sustain the knowledge acquired so that they can be able to utilize various skills and use them specifically as the occasion demands.

4. **Provision of Facilities:** The universities should equip more adequately the practicum laboratories or make provisions for same in a situation where there is none. The practicum laboratory is essential because the teachers will demonstrate the various methods and skills to be utilized so that the students can be involved in discussions, role plays, etc which enables them acquire the relevant experiences needed to function outside the university not only in the secondary schools but in the hospitals, prisons, rehabilitation centres, etc. Other essential materials meant for counsellor training should be provided by the universities. The trainees require such tools as psychological test kits, both foreign and local, teaching and learning aids such as the two-way mirror, relevant text books and audio/video recorders. For instance, experience has shown that some universities acquire the video and other materials which were not used for teaching but only kept for the purpose of securing accreditation of their programmes by the National Universities Commission.

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