



Counsellor Trainees' Assessment of their Competencies in Counselling Skills in Tertiary Institutions in Delta and Anambra States

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Abstract

The study investigated how trainee counsellors who will graduate to become school counsellor assess their competencies in the skill that are needed for school counselling. Five research questions and two null hypotheses guided the study. The study adopted the descriptive survey research design. The population comprised all final year undergraduate and postgraduate students of Guidance and Counselling in Delta and Anambra State in the 2021/2022 Academic Session, with a total of 266 undergraduate students and 100 postgraduate students. The sample size comprised 133 undergraduate students and 50 postgraduate students, representing 50% of the entire population. The students were drawn randomly from the population to represent undergraduate and postgraduate students in the two selected universities in Delta and Anambra States. A multistage sampling method was used to select the sample. The instrument that was used in the study is a questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed by the researcher. The instrument was validated by 3 experts from Guidance and Counselling Department (including the research supervisor). The reliability of the instrument was established by administering the questionnaire to 50 students in Edo State. The data obtained was analysed using Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient and a coefficient of 0.98 was obtained. The statistical mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while independent samples t-test was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The findings of the study revealed that the students are competent in questioning and empathy skills but are not competent in listening, reframing and paraphrasing skills; that the students are competent in questioning and empathic skills; that the students are incompetent in listening, rephrasing and paraphrasing skills; that both male and female students are competent in questioning and empathy skills but are not competent in listening, reframing and paraphrasing skills; and that undergraduate students are competent in questioning and empathy skills but are not competent in listening, reframing and paraphrasing skills, while and postgraduate students are competent in all the skills. Amongst others, the study recommended that there should be more extensive monitoring of trainees' development during their training to verify and refine the observed changes in them.

Keywords: Counsellor Trainees, Assessment, Competencies, Counselling Skills, Tertiary Institutions

Introduction

There appears to be a gap in achievement of the goal of school counselling as a vision in national policy on education. The goals of school counselling in Nigeria include to reduce cultism among students; to help minimize examination malpractice; to reduce school drop-out; and to improve interpersonal relationship among pupils or learners (FGN, 2014).

In order to achieve the above goals, Federal Government of Nigeria through the National Policy on Education makes it compulsory for guidance counsellors to be deployed in all primary and tertiary education, observation seems to reveal that these problems are still common in schools. For instance, there are still cases of school dropout which is notable even in tertiary education when students are expelled from school as a result of examination malpractice. There are still reported cases of cultism even among primary school pupils. Bullying is still common among primary and secondary school students. There are still cases of prostitution among secondary school students and even in tertiary institutions. These have raised the question of how competent school counsellors are in carrying out their duties. For effective counselling, school counsellor requires knowledge and competence in counselling skills which include active listening, questioning, note taking, interpretation, non-verbal communication- competency, self-awareness, trustworthiness, empathy, emotional compartmentalization, information real, confidentiality and record keeping (McLeod & McLeod, 2011).

Another development that calls for the need for counselling skills are the need for community-based counselling which is essential to address the growing problem of kidnapping, banditry, terminal diseases, prostitution, requires that counsellors be eminently competent in order to handle this adult population. Secondly, thinking among practitioners is fast bringing to fall the need to post counsellor trainees to non-school settings such as hospital, correctional centres, there is need to know how well a counsellor possess a skill that is needed to function in this out-of-School settings.

Counselling performance has been, by definition, a primary focus for counsellor education and supervision since the early days of counsellor preparation. More specifically, counsellor educators have always been concerned with counselling students' acquisition and implementation of the knowledge and skills necessary to becoming an effective, ethical counsellor. Following this tradition, the past decades have seen a systematic and comprehensive concern for not only assessing the performance of an individual counselling student, but also the effectiveness of counsellor education programs in preparing entry-level professional counsellors (Urofsky & Bobby, 2012).

One important issue for practicing counsellors is the need to assess the skills they possess that can most readily be translated into practice (Cummings, 2012). Falender and Shafranske (2017) argued that competence is a dynamic construct in expertise which requires accommodation to the continuous advance of knowledge in the field. A

competency-based approach provides a model to consider the means to identify and apply knowledge, skills and values that are needed in a counsellor's work. Spring (2017) stated that counsellors need additional skills to act as creators, synthesizers and consumers of research evidence.

Counselling is increasingly moving towards a competency-based approach in work settings like many other health care professions. Though there is no agreement about the definition of competence, there is a definite agreement on the need for one (Leigh, et al., 2017; Nelson, 2017). At the moment what should be the necessary competencies for professional practice is a critical question (Leigh, et al., 2017). Competence can be determined as an integration of scientific knowledge, information related to the target of the expert's work and professional experience (Nelson, 2017). The foundation of competence consists of the ability to utilize scientific information and methods. It also includes reflective practices and self-assessment (Rodolfa, et al., 2015).

Self-assessment helps counsellors to identify what kind of knowledge, skills and experience are needed for continued professional development by reviewing progress in learning (Belar, et al., 2011). Student self-assessment is an evaluation of a student's own work products and processes in classroom settings. Formative assessment (a.k.a., Assessment for Learning) policies argue that student self-assessment is useful for raising academic performance (Black & Wiliam, 2016). Research evidence suggests that self-assessment does contribute positively to learning outcomes, but its effects are highly variable, with many threats to its validity (Brown & Harris, 2013). Nonetheless, student self-assessment is strongly advocated as an important classroom practice (e.g., Leahy, et al., 2015). In view of the above, the aim of the study is to examine the counsellor trainees' assessment of their competencies in counselling skills in Delta and Anambra States.

Statement of the Problem

The prevalent of problem such as school drop-out, cultism, early pregnancy raised the issue of how well counselling is practiced, how counselling is carried out in our school system. In order to effectively practice counselling, there are certain counselling skills that trainees are expected to possess. Mastery of these counselling skills will help the trainee counsellors to improve in their counselling and use them to assist students out of their various problems.

It is sad to not that several years after the introduction of guidance and counselling in schools and the many years of practice of guidance and counselling in both school and community setting, the above still persists. Anti-Social behaviour are still prevalence among secondary school and undergraduate students.

The researcher is therefore, worried. Is it that those who graduate from the counselling department are not competent enough to provide adequate counselling services in the society? How well are counsellor trainees who hope to graduate to become school

counsellors assess their skills and competencies required for effective counselling in school? Specifically, how well do counsellor trainees master these counselling skills to enable them counsel students against the above-mentioned problem? The problem of this study therefore, is, to what extent have counsellor trainees mastered the competencies in counselling skills?

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the mean assessment of competence of trainee on the different counselling skills?
2. In which of the counselling skills do student assess as competent?
3. Which of the counselling skills do trainees assess themselves as incompetent?
4. Do male and female trainees differ in the assessment of competence in counselling skills?
5. Do trainees' level of training influence their mean assessment of their competencies in counselling skills?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses guided the study:

1. There is no significant difference in the mean assessment of counselling skills competencies by male and female counsellor trainees
2. There is no significant different among postgraduate and undergraduate trainees in the mean assessment in their counselling competences

Theoretical Framework of the Study

This study is anchored on the constructivist theory, propounded by Lev Vygotsky's (1896–1934). The theory is an approach to learning that holds that people actively construct or make their own knowledge and that reality is determined by the experiences of the learner (Elliott et al., 2010). In elaborating constructivists' ideas Arends (2008) states that constructivism believes in personal construction of meaning by the learner through experience, and that meaning is influenced by the interaction of prior knowledge and new events.

Constructivism's central idea is that human learning is constructed, that learners build new knowledge upon the foundation of previous learning. This prior knowledge influences what new or modified knowledge an individual will construct from new learning experiences (Phillips, 2005).

The second notion is that learning is an active rather than a passive process. The passive view of teaching views the learner as 'an empty vessel' to be filled with knowledge,

whereas constructivism states that learners construct meaning only through active engagement with the world (such as experiments or real-world problem solving). Information may be passively received, but understanding cannot be, for it must come from making meaningful connections between prior knowledge, new knowledge, and the processes involved in learning.

The constructivist also believed that all knowledge is socially constructed. Learning is a social activity - it is something we do together, in interaction with each other, rather than an abstract concept (Dewey, 1938). For example, Vygotsky (1978), believed that community plays a central role in the process of "making meaning." For Vygotsky, the environment in which children grow up will influence how they think and what they think about. Thus, all teaching and learning is a matter of sharing and negotiating socially constituted knowledge. For example, Vygotsky (1978) states cognitive development stems from social interactions from guided learning within the zone of proximal development as children and their partner's co-construct knowledge.

The constructivist further postulated that all knowledge is personal. Each individual learner has a distinctive point of view, based on existing knowledge and values. This means that same lesson, teaching or activity may result in different learning by each student, as their subjective interpretations differ. This principle appears to contradict the view that knowledge is socially constructed. Fox (2011, p. 30) argues (a) that although individuals have their own personal history of learning, nevertheless they can share in common knowledge, and (b) that although education is a social process, powerfully influenced by cultural factors, nevertheless cultures are made up of sub- cultures, even to the point of being composed of sub-cultures of one. Cultures and their knowledge-base are constantly in a process of change and the knowledge stored by individuals is not a rigid copy of some socially constructed template. In learning a culture, each child changes that culture.

The constructivist theory is related to the present study because it advocates the full engagement of learners in the construction of their own knowledge. In order to construct new sound knowledge, learners must assess this knowledge to fill gaps in it and to make sure of connections between its parts. In the absence of these revisiting processes, there can be no real construction of knowledge. Self-assessment can therefore be regarded as vital for the building of sound knowledge to occur.

Methods

A descriptive survey research design was adopted and used in the study. The population comprised 266 final year undergraduate and postgraduate students of Guidance and Counselling in Delta and Anambra States in the 2021/2022 Academic Session. The sample size comprised 133 undergraduate students and 50 postgraduate students, representing 50% of the entire population. The students were drawn randomly from the

population to represent undergraduate and postgraduate students in the two selected universities in Delta and Anambra States. A multistage sampling method was used to select the sample. Using purposive sampling, the universities that are running Guidance and Counselling programme in the two states were selected in the first stage. Then, using proportionate sampling technique, 50% of the students were selected from each of the selected universities. For instance, in Delta State University, a total of 51 undergraduate students and 14 postgraduate students were selected while in Anambra State University, a total of 82 undergraduate students and 32 postgraduate students were selected.

The instrument that was used in the study is a questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed by the researcher. A self-developed questionnaire was used for collection of data. The instrument was developed using counselling skills identified by McLeod and McLeod (2011). It has 23 items structured on a 4-point scale, ranging from 1 for poor to 4 for very good. Validity of the instrument was established using two methods. Experts' judgement and factor analysis. Experts in Guidance and Counselling were given the instrument to ascertain how well it covered the counselling skills. Factor analysis was used to establish content and construct validity. The instrument was administered to 50 students in Edo State and the data obtained were subjected to factor analysis. The principal component analysis of the extraction method was used to estimate the content validity of the instrument. It yielded a value of 84.19%. In order to estimate the construct validity of the instrument, the rotated factor loading using the varimax method was done, which yielded a value ranging from 0.52-0.86. In order to establish the reliability of the instruments, 50 copies of the instruments were distributed and administered to 50 students in Edo State. The data generated were analysed with Cronbach Alpha Reliability Coefficient in order to determine whether the instruments have internal consistency. A coefficient of 0.98 was obtained.

The researcher directly collected the data from the students. She used two research assistants, who were students of Guidance and Counselling in the selected schools to collect the data. The research assistants were inducted on the purpose and content of the instrument. This was to ensure that they did the same thing in the field. The questionnaire was given to the respondents to fill. The researchers waited and collected it back from them in order to avoid misplacement. The statistical mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while independent samples t-test was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Research Question 1: What is the mean assessment of competence of trainee on the different counselling skills?

Table 1: Mean assessment of competence of trainee on the different counselling skills

S/N	Skill	Mean	SD	Remark
Listening Skills				
1.	Ability to pay attention to every statement involving body movement	1.82	1.01	Not Competent
2.	Ability to pay attention to every sign that a client makes in a counselling encounter	1.91	0.97	Not Competent
3.	Ability to pay attention to non-verbal communication	1.99	0.95	Not Competent
4.	Ability to listen actively	3.68	0.49	Competent
Average Mean		2.35	0.86	Not Competent
Questioning Skills				
5.	Ability to use open questions to clarify understanding of what the client is feeling	1.98	0.96	Not Competent
6.	Ability to ask questions	3.49	0.62	Competent
7.	Ability to respond to questions	3.37	0.74	Competent
8.	Ability to restate questions	3.30	0.66	Competent
9.	Ability to modify questions	2.17	0.94	Not Competent
Average Mean		2.86	0.78	Competent
Reframing Skills				
10.	Ability to give alternative statements of what clients say	2.05	0.83	Not Competent
11.	Ability to keep clients at alert	1.96	0.89	Not Competent
12.	Ability to challenge client's cognitions	2.05	0.92	Not Competent
13.	Ability to manipulate the information presented	2.11	0.91	Not Competent
Average Mean		2.04	0.89	Not Competent
Paraphrasing Skills				
14.	Ability to respond to client's statements while expressing their problems in phrases	1.92	0.99	Not Competent
15.	Ability to use phrases to build what the client says	2.17	0.83	Not Competent
16.	Ability to use phrases to blend what the client says	2.08	0.89	Not Competent
17.	Ability to use phrases to facilitate what the client says	2.14	0.89	Not Competent
Average Mean		2.08	0.90	Not Competent
Empathy Skills				
18.	Ability to demonstrate to clients that he/she is	3.50	0.72	Competent

19.	able to demonstrate to clients that he/she is aware of their feelings and emotions	3.50	0.69	Competent
20.	Ability to understand clients' problems	3.48	0.64	Competent
21.	Ability to understand client's feelings	3.52	0.62	Competent
22.	Ability to sense the hurt or pleasure as another person sees it	1.87	1.09	Not Competent
23.	Ability to perceive the causes of a client's problems as he perceives them	1.90	0.96	Not Competent
Average Mean		2.96	0.79	Competent
Criterion Mean = 2.50				

Table 1 shows the mean competence of trainee on the different counselling skills. From the result, the mean competence for listening skills ranged from 1.82 to 3.68 with an average mean of 2.35; for questioning skills, the mean competence ranged from 1.98 to 3.49, with an average mean of 2.86; for reframing skills, the mean competence ranged from 1.96 to 2.11, with an average mean of 2.04. The result also shows that the mean competence for paraphrasing skills ranged from 1.92 to 2.17, with an average mean of 2.08; while the mean competence for empathy skills ranged from 1.87 to 3.52, with an average mean of 2.96. The criterion mean used for the assessment is 2.50, which means that the students are competent in questioning and empathy skills but are not competent in listening, reframing and paraphrasing skills, as shown in the remark section of the table.

Research Question 2: In which of the counselling skills do student assess as competent?

Table 2: Mean assessment of the counselling skills in which the student assesses as competent

S/N	Skill	Mean	SD	Remark
Listening Skills				
1.	Ability to listen actively	3.68	0.49	Competent
Questioning Skills				
2.	Ability to ask questions	3.49	0.62	Competent
3.	Ability to respond to questions	3.37	0.74	Competent
4.	Ability to restate questions	3.30	0.66	Competent
Empathy Skills				
5.	Ability to demonstrate to clients that he/she is aware of their feelings	3.50	0.72	Competent
6.	Ability to demonstrate to clients that he/she is aware of their emotions	3.50	0.69	Competent
7.	Ability to understand clients' problems	3.48	0.64	Competent
8.	Ability to understand client's feelings	3.52	0.62	Competent
Average Mean		3.48	0.65	Competent
Criterion Mean = 2.50				

Table 2 shows the mean assessment of the counselling skills in which the student assesses as competent. From the result, the mean ranged from 3.37 to 3.68, with an average mean of 3.48. This means that the students are competent in ability to listen actively, ability to understand client's feelings, ability to demonstrate to clients that he/she is aware of their emotions, and ability to demonstrate to clients that he/she is aware of their feelings. They are also competent in ability to ask questions, ability to understand clients' problems, ability to respond to questions and ability to restate questions. These skills mostly translate questioning and empathic skills.

Research Question 3: Which of the counselling skills do trainees assess themselves as incompetent?

Table 3: Mean assessment of the counselling skills in which the student assesses as incompetent

S/N	Skill	Mean	SD	Remark
Listening Skills				
1.	Ability to pay attention to every statement involving body movement	1.82	1.01	Not Competent
2.	Ability to pay attention to every sign that a client makes in a counselling encounter	1.91	0.97	Not Competent
3.	Ability to pay attention to non-verbal communication	1.99	0.95	Not Competent
Questioning Skills				
4.	Ability to use open questions to clarify understanding of what the client is feeling	1.98	0.96	Not Competent
5.	Ability to modify questions	2.17	0.94	Not Competent
Reframing Skills				
6.	Ability to give alternative statements of what clients say	2.05	0.83	Not Competent
7.	Ability to keep clients at alert	1.96	0.89	Not Competent
8.	Ability to challenge client's cognitions	2.05	0.92	Not Competent
9.	Ability to manipulate the information presented	2.11	0.91	Not Competent
Paraphrasing Skills				
10.	Ability to respond to client's statements while expressing their problems in phrases	1.92	0.99	Not Competent
11.	Ability to use phrases to build what the client says	2.17	0.83	Not Competent
12.	Ability to use phrases to blend what the client says	2.08	0.89	Not Competent

13.	Ability to use phrases to facilitate what the client says	2.14	0.89	Not Competent
Empathy Skills				
14.	Ability to sense the hurt or pleasure as another person sees it	1.87	1.09	Not Competent
15.	Ability to perceive the causes of a client's problems as he perceives them	1.90	0.96	Not Competent
Average Mean		2.01	0.94	Competent
Criterion Mean = 2.50				

Table 3 shows the mean assessment of the counselling skills in which the student assesses as incompetent. From the result, the mean ranged from 1.82 to 2.17, with an average mean of 2.01. This means that the students are incompetent in ability to pay attention to every statement involving body movement, ability to sense the hurt or pleasure as another person sees it, ability to perceive the causes of a client's problems as he perceives them, ability to pay attention to every sign that a client makes in a counselling encounter, ability to respond to client's statements while expressing their problems in phrases, ability to keep clients at alert, ability to use open questions to clarify understanding of what the client is feeling and ability to pay attention to non-verbal communication. The students are also incompetent in ability to give alternative statements of what clients say, ability to challenge client's cognitions, ability to use phrases to blend what the client says, ability to manipulate the information presented. ability to use phrases to facilitate what the client says, ability to use phrases to build what the client says, ability to modify questions.

Research Question 4: Do male and female trainees differ in the assessment of competence in counselling skills?

Table 4: Mean comparison of counselling skills between male and female students

S/ N	Skill	Male N = 72			Female N = 111		
		Mean	SD	Remark	Mean	SD	Remark
Listening Skills							
1.	Ability to pay attention to every statement involving body movement	1.79	1.06	Not Competent	1.84	0.98	Not Competent
2.	Ability to pay attention to every sign that a client makes in a counselling encounter	1.92	0.98	Not Competent	1.91	0.98	Not Competent
3.	Ability to pay attention to non-verbal communication	2.04	0.94	Not Competent	1.96	0.95	Not Competent
4.	Ability to listen actively	3.74	0.50	Competent	3.65	0.48	Competent
Average Mean		2.37	0.87	Not	2.34	0.85	Not

			Competent				Competent
Questioning Skills							
5.	Ability to use open questions to clarify understanding of what the client is feeling	1.90	0.97	Not Competent	2.04	0.96	Not Competent
6.	Ability to ask questions	3.38	0.64	Competent	3.56	0.60	Competent
7.	Ability to respond to questions	3.42	0.65	Competent	3.33	0.79	Competent
8.	Ability to restate questions	3.38	0.70	Competent	3.25	0.63	Competent
9.	Ability to modify questions	2.08	0.93	Not Competent	2.23	0.94	Not Competent
Average Mean		2.83	0.78	Competent	2.88	0.78	Competent
Reframing Skills							
10.	Ability to give alternative statements of what clients say	1.99	0.78	Not Competent	2.09	0.86	Not Competent
11.	Ability to keep clients at alert	2.03	0.95	Not Competent	1.92	0.85	Not Competent
12.	Ability to challenge client's cognitions	2.11	0.97	Not Competent	2.02	0.89	Not Competent
13.	Ability to manipulate the information presented	2.14	0.97	Not Competent	2.09	0.88	Not Competent
Average Mean		2.07	0.92	Not Competent	2.03	0.87	Not Competent
Paraphrasing Skills							
14.	Ability to respond to client's statements while expressing their problems in phrases	1.94	1.03	Not Competent	1.90	0.97	Not Competent
15.	Ability to use phrases to build what the client says	2.13	0.73	Not Competent	2.20	0.89	Not Competent
16.	Ability to use phrases to blend what the client says	1.94	0.87	Not Competent	2.16	0.89	Not Competent
17.	Ability to use phrases to facilitate what the client says	2.10	0.91	Not Competent	2.17	0.88	Not Competent
Average Mean		2.03	0.89	Not Competent	2.11	0.91	Not Competent
Empathy Skills							
18.	Ability to demonstrate to clients that he/she is aware of their feelings	3.42	0.73	Competent	3.55	0.71	Competent
19.	Ability to demonstrate to	3.49	0.65	Competent	3.50	0.71	Competent

	clients that he/she is aware of their emotions						
20.	Ability to understand clients' problems	3.40	0.64	Competent	3.52	0.63	Competent
21.	Ability to understand client's feelings	3.54	0.65	Competent	3.50	0.60	Competent
22.	Ability to sense the hurt or pleasure as another person sees it	1.96	1.14	Not Competent	1.81	1.05	Not Competent
23.	Ability to perceive the causes of a client's problems as he perceives them	1.89	0.91	Not Competent	1.90	0.99	Not Competent
Average Mean		2.95	0.79	Competent	2.96	0.78	Competent
Criterion Mean = 2.50							

Table 4 shows the mean competence of male and female trainee on the different counselling skills. From the result, the mean competence for listening skills ranged from 1.79 to 3.74, with an average mean of 2.37 for male trainees and from 1.84 to 3.65, with an average mean of 2.34 for female trainees; for questioning skills, the mean competence ranged from 1.90 to 3.42, with an average mean of 2.83 for male trainees and 2.04 and 3.56, with an average mean of 2.88 for female trainees; for reframing skills, the mean competence ranged from 1.99 to 2.14 for male trainees, with an average mean of 2.07 and from 1.92 to 2.09 with an average mean of 2.03 for female trainees. The result also shows that the mean competence for paraphrasing skills ranged from 1.94 to 2.13, with an average mean of 2.03 for male trainees and from 1.90 to 2.20 with an average mean of 2.11 for female trainees; while the mean competence for empathy skills ranged from 1.89 to 3.54, with an average mean of 2.95 for male trainees and from 1.81 to 3.55, with an average mean of 2.6 for female trainees. The criterion mean used for the assessment is 2.50, which means that both male and female students are competent in questioning and empathy skills but are not competent in listening, reframing and paraphrasing skills. This result suggests that male and female trainees do not differ in the assessment of competence in counselling skills.

Research Question 5: Do trainees' level of training influence their mean assessment of their competencies in counselling skills?

Table 5: Mean comparison of counselling skills between undergraduate and postgraduate students

S/N	Skill	Undergraduate N = 133			Postgraduate N = 50		
		Mean	SD	Remark	Mean	SD	Remark
Listening Skills							

1.	Ability to pay attention to every statement involving body movement	1.44	0.61	Not Competent	2.82	1.17	Competent
2.	Ability to pay attention to every sign that a client makes in a counselling encounter	1.57	0.64	Not Competent	2.82	1.12	Competent
3.	Ability to pay attention to non-verbal communication	1.77	0.78	Not Competent	2.60	1.09	Competent
4.	Ability to listen actively	3.65	0.51	Competent	3.76	0.43	Competent
	Average Mean	2.11	0.64	Not Competent	3.00	0.95	Competent
Questioning Skills							
5.	Ability to use open questions to clarify understanding of what the client is feeling	1.65	0.69	Not Competent	2.86	1.05	Competent
6.	Ability to ask questions	3.44	0.62	Competent	3.60	0.61	Competent
7.	Ability to respond to questions	3.38	0.73	Competent	3.32	0.77	Competent
8.	Ability to restate questions	3.32	0.66	Competent	3.24	0.66	Competent
9.	Ability to modify questions	2.05	0.94	Not Competent	2.52	0.86	Competent
	Average Mean	2.77	0.73	Competent	3.11	0.79	Competent
Reframing Skills							
10.	Ability to give alternative statements of what clients say	1.86	0.72	Not Competent	2.56	0.88	Competent
11.	Ability to keep	1.69	0.64	Not	2.68	1.06	Competent

12.	clients at alert Ability to challenge client's cognitions	1.82	0.78	Competent Not Competent	2.68	1.00	Competent
13.	Ability to manipulate the information presented	2.03	0.90	Not Competent	2.32	0.91	Not Competent
	Average Mean	1.85	0.76	Not Competent	2.56	0.96	Competent
Paraphrasing Skills							
14.	Ability to respond to client's statements while expressing their problems in phrases	1.60	0.71	Not Competent	2.76	1.15	Competent
15.	Ability to use phrases to build what the client says	1.97	0.70	Not Competent	2.70	0.93	Competent
16.	Ability to use phrases to blend what the client says	1.89	0.76	Not Competent	2.58	1.01	Competent
17.	Ability to use phrases to facilitate what the client says	1.92	0.79	Not Competent	2.72	0.88	Competent
	Average Mean	1.85	0.74	Not Competent	2.69	0.99	Competent
Empathy Skills							
18.	Ability to demonstrate to clients that he/she is aware of their feelings	3.47	0.73	Competent	3.56	0.68	Competent
19.	Ability to demonstrate to clients that he/she is aware of their	3.48	0.70	Competent	3.54	0.65	Competent

20.	emotions Ability to understand clients' problems	3.47	0.63	Competent	3.50	0.65	Competent
21.	Ability to understand client's feelings	3.49	0.64	Competent	3.60	0.57	Competent
22.	Ability to sense the hurt or pleasure as another person sees it	1.47	0.72	Not Competent	2.92	1.19	Competent
23.	Ability to perceive the causes of a client's problems as he perceives them	1.57	0.62	Not Competent	2.76	1.15	Competent
	Average Mean	2.83	0.67	Competent	3.31	0.82	Competent
Criterion Mean = 2.50							

Table 5 shows the mean competence of undergraduate and postgraduate trainee on the different counselling skills. From the result, the mean competence for listening skills ranged from 1.44 to 3.65 with an average mean of 2.11 for undergraduate trainees and from 2.60 to 3.76, with an average mean of 3.00 for postgraduate trainees; for questioning skills, the mean competence ranged from 1.65 to 3.44, with an average mean of 2.77 for undergraduate trainees and 2.52 and 3.60, with an average mean of 3.11 for postgraduate trainees; for reframing skills, the mean competence ranged from 1.69 to 2.03 for undergraduate trainees, with an average mean of 1.85 and from 2.32 to 2.68 with an average mean of 2.56 for postgraduate students. The result also shows that the mean competence for paraphrasing skills ranged from 1.60 to 1.97, with an average mean of 1.85 for undergraduate trainees and from 2.58 to 2.76 with an average mean of 2.69 for postgraduate trainees; while the mean competence for empathy skills ranged from 1.47 to 3.49, with an average mean of 3.31 for undergraduate trainees and from 2.76 to 3.60, with an average mean of 3.31 for postgraduate trainees. The criterion mean used for the assessment is 2.50, which means that undergraduate students are competent in questioning and empathy skills but are not competent in listening, reframing and paraphrasing skills, while and postgraduate students are competent in all the skills. This result suggests that trainees' level of training influence their mean assessment of their competencies in counselling skills.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in the mean assessment of counselling skills competencies by male and female counsellor trainees

Table 6: t-test analysis of the skill competence for male and female students

Skill	Gender	n	Mean	SD	df	t	p	Remark
Listening Skills	Male	72	2.37	0.66	181	0.32	0.75	Not
	Female	111	2.34	0.64				Significant
Questioning Skills	Male	72	2.83	0.38	181	0.92	0.36	Not
	Female	111	2.88	0.38				Significant
Reframing Skills	Male	72	2.07	0.67	181	0.38	0.70	Not
	Female	111	2.03	0.61				Significant
Paraphrasing Skills	Male	72	2.03	0.72	181	0.73	0.47	Not
	Female	111	2.11	0.74				Significant
Empathy Skills	Male	72	2.95	0.39	181	0.26	0.80	Not
	Female	111	2.97	0.45				Significant

$\alpha = 0.05$

Table 6 shows the result of an independent samples t-test, which was used to compare the counselling skill competence of male and female counselling trainees. The result shows that there is no significant gender difference in the counselling skill competence between male and female counselling trainees. Hence, the null hypothesis is therefore accepted.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant different between postgraduate and undergraduate trainees in the mean assessment in their counselling competences

Table 7: t-test analysis of the skill competence for postgraduate and undergraduate trainees

Skill	Level	n	Mean	SD	df	t	p	Remark
Listening Skills	Postgraduate	133	2.11	0.35	181	7.61	0.000	Significant
	Undergraduate	50	3.00	0.80				
Questioning Skills	Postgraduate	133	2.77	0.30	181	5.00	0.000	Significant
	Undergraduate	50	3.11	0.44				
Reframing Skills	Postgraduate	133	1.85	0.44	181	6.20	0.000	Significant
	Undergraduate	50	2.56	0.76				
Paraphrasing Skills	Postgraduate	133	1.85	0.53	181	6.62	0.000	Significant
	Undergraduate	50	2.69	0.84				
Empathy Skills	Postgraduate	133	2.83	0.30	181	6.50	0.000	Significant
	Undergraduate	50	3.31	0.50				

$\alpha = 0.05$

Table 7 shows the result of an independent samples t-test, which was used to compare the counselling skill competence of postgraduate and undergraduate counselling trainees. The result shows that there is a significant difference in the counselling skill competence between

postgraduate and postgraduate counselling trainees. Hence, the null hypothesis is therefore accepted.

Discussion

The first finding revealed that the students are competent in questioning and empathy skills but are not competent in listening, reframing and paraphrasing skills. This means that the students have been trained and can effectively use open questions to clarify understanding of what the client is feeling, ask, respond to, restate and modify questions. They can also effectively demonstrate to clients that they are aware of their feelings and emotions, understand clients' problems and feelings, sense the hurt or pleasure as another person sees it and perceive the causes of a client's problems as he or she perceives them. The possible reason for this finding is that the trainees have been exposed to these skills from their practicum experience. Hence, they will be able to effectively practice the skills on their clients during counselling process.

The above finding agrees with Hill and Knox (2013), whose finding revealed improvement in skill competence across time in among counselling trainees. The finding is also consistent with Mueller (2013), whose finding showed that student counsellors performed very well on performance assessment.

The second finding showed that the students are competent in ability to listen actively, ability to understand client's feelings, ability to demonstrate to clients that he/she is aware of their emotions, and ability to demonstrate to clients that he/she is aware of their feelings. They are also competent in ability to ask questions, ability to understand clients' problems, ability to respond to questions and ability to restate questions. These skills mostly translate questioning and empathic skills. The finding suggests that the counselling trainees are only competent in questioning and empathic skills. Most of these skills were taught to them at the undergraduate level during their practicum experience.

The above finding agrees with Lutz, et al. (2017), who found in their study that most trainee counsellors are competent in questioning skills. The finding is also in line with the finding of Kim, et al. (2016), who found that most psychologist trainees are skilled in empathic behaviours, that they are able to put personalised the challenges of their clients and help them resolve such issues.

The third finding revealed that the students are incompetent in ability to pay attention to every statement involving body movement, ability to sense the hurt or pleasure as another person sees it, ability to perceive the causes of a client's problems as he perceives them, ability to pay attention to every sign that a client makes in a counselling encounter, ability to respond to client's statements while expressing their problems in phrases, ability to keep clients at alert, ability to use open questions to clarify understanding of what the client is feeling and ability to pay attention to non-verbal communication. The students are also incompetent in ability to give alternative statements of what clients say,

ability to challenge client's cognitions, ability to use phrases to blend what the client says, ability to manipulate the information presented. ability to use phrases to facilitate what the client says, ability to use phrases to build what the client says, ability to modify questions. These skills are mostly in the area of listening, reframing and paraphrasing skills. This finding implies that most of the counsellor trainees need training in these area. The probable reason for this finding is that majority of the respondents are undergraduates and at the level of their study, may not have been fully exposed to these skills.

The above finding is consistent with the finding of Juhani, et al. (2008), which revealed that even after four years of studies, most of the students were still incompetent of the skills needed to practice their psychology skills. The finding also supports Spring (2017), whose finding suggests that counsellor trainees need additional skills for effective counselling.

The fourth finding showed that both male and female students are competent in questioning and empathy skills but are not competent in listening, reframing and paraphrasing skills. This result suggests that male and female trainees do not differ in the assessment of competence in counselling skills. A corresponding hypothesis revealed that there is no significant difference in the mean assessment of counselling skills competencies by male and female counsellor trainees. This finding implies that gender does not influence the counselling skills among counselling trainees. This could be because both male and female trainees are exposed to similar learning condition and content. During their lectures, there is usually no discrimination on the basis of their gender. More so, the counselling skills are not gender-based. In other words, both male and female counsellors have similar potential to possess these skills.

The above finding is in line with Lam, Tracz and Lucey (2013), who studied the counselling self-efficacy of students in a counsellor education programme, in regard to age, gender, and ethnicity characteristics, and found that no significant gender difference exists in regard to the counselling self-efficacy of the students. The finding however, disagrees with Artkoski and Saarnio (2013), whose finding suggests that female therapists were significantly more positive toward clients than were male therapists.

The fifth finding revealed that undergraduate students are competent in questioning and empathy skills but are not competent in listening, reframing and paraphrasing skills, while and postgraduate students are competent in all the skills. This result suggests that trainees' level of training influence their mean assessment of their competencies in counselling skills. A corresponding hypothesis showed that there is a significant different between postgraduate and undergraduate trainees in the mean assessment in their counselling competences. The finding further showed that postgraduate students are more competent in all the counselling skills more than their undergraduate counterparts. The reason for this finding is not farfetched. Postgraduates' students are often more exposed deeply to these skills more than undergraduate students. Hence, it is expected

that postgraduate students will be more competent in the skills.

The above finding agrees with Messina, et al. (2017), who carried out a study on trainees' self-evaluation of their development as therapists, and found that year in training and support in supervision predicted their competence as therapists. Their finding suggests that a difference between beginners and advanced trainees regarding their competence. The finding also supports the finding of Powell, et al. (2010), which showed that trainees' experience level can predict their competence.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it is therefore, concluded that postgraduate students were competent in counselling skills than undergraduate students. While undergraduate students are competent in questioning and empathy skills but are not competent in listening, reframing and paraphrasing skills, while and postgraduate students are competent in all the skills. Both male and female students had similar level of competence in the counselling skills.

Arising from the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. There should be more extensive monitoring of trainees' development during their training to verify and refine the observed changes in them
2. The students should be encouraged to practice the various skills in which they are competent especially during their practicum exercise
3. Undergraduate students should be more exposed to those counselling skills in which they are not competent
4. A mentorship programme should be organised among undergraduate and postgraduate students so that postgraduate students can be assigned to some undergraduate students to mentor them.

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