

Strategies for Counselling Secondary School Students with Learning Disabilities in Cross River State

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Abstract - The goal of this study was to determine strategies for counseling secondary school students with learning disabilities in Cross River State. The need to strengthen the strategies already in use for counseling these students with learning disabilities prompted the study. Two hypothesis were formulated for the study and descriptive survey design was employed. A well-structured questionnaire was constructed by the researcher and completed by 246 counsellors, comprising of all the counsellor in public secondary schools in Cross River State. Data collected was analyzed using mean, standard deviation and ANOVA Statistical techniques. Hypothesis one was tested using one way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), the findings showed an f – ratio value of 4.0648 with the significant value of 0.0001. Since the significant value is less than 0.05 set-as level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected, which implies that there is a significant difference on the mean ratings of male and female counsellors on strategies used for counselling students with learning disabilities in Cross River State. The respondents agreed to all the items (1, 2, 3,4,5,6,7,8,9 and 10) of the questionnaire as strategies used by counsellors in the research area and that personality factors hinder counseling of students with learning disabilities. It was recommended among others that; Guidance Counsellors, Counseling Association of Nigeria should ensure that there are guidance counselors' forums to review strategies for counseling students with learning disabilities and government should make adequate funds available for counseling services.

Keywords: Counselling, learning disabilities, Strategies, students.

1. Introduction

The counsellor is a bridge builder between learners, especially students with learning disabilities (L.D.) and the realization of their dreams. Hence, [5] classifies guidance and counselling services as educational services. Counseling has long been an instrument for enhancing abilities and providing guidance to individuals with learning disabilities that impede their abilities to function successfully in schools.

Children with L.D., as stated by [3] are those who find the conventional classroom boring or frustrating because of the difficulties they experience in coping with their colleagues in any given task. They usually perform below average compared to their classmates in academic and other related activities. Regular teachers find it difficult to manage the problems these children encounter in the classroom. This could be due to their little or no knowledge of these types of children in questions.

The above characters of L.D., are being manifested in secondary school students in Cross River State. Secondary education is the education children receive after primary education before the tertiary stage as stated by the national policy on education, [5]. [5], state in clear terms the objectives of secondary education; which is to provide all primary school leavers with the opportunity for education of higher level irrespective of sex, social status, religion or ethnic background.

Some counselling strategies adopted by counsellors in counseling learners with L.D., are: conducting of individual and group counseling to help students to improve classroom behavior, increase self-esteem, develop positive interpersonal relationships including these students in peer facilitation programs which will encourage peer interaction and help to foster social acceptance and self-confidence promote awareness and understanding of the unique needs of this population by advocating on their behalf to school and communities.

The issue of no counsellor in school is considered serious enough that in the year 2021, the state ministry of education in Cross River State directed the employment of at least a school counsellor in all secondary schools. The forum of the state ministry of education report of the year 2021 confirmed this observation. Consequently, students with LD do not have good academic performance at end of term examinations. It is this situation that has necessitated this study to examine through research the strategies for counseling.

Poor counseling strategies are a serious problem that requires the attention of all stakeholders in education, the ministry of education, teachers and parents specifically from

Cross River State. Since no steps have been taken by schools and education authorities in Cross River State to cater for this problem. This study is therefore, concerned with assessing counseling strategies for students with L.D.

1.1 Statement of the problem

It has been observed that children with learning disabilities often face lots of difficulties in classrooms especially, feeling of depression and sometimes rejections. Many-a-times teachers do not want to have such students in their classes. The students with learning disabilities are faced with uncountable challenges coping with such situation.

Parents, teachers, education authorities and government agencies have over the years shown growing concern over observed increasing rate of few counsellors in Nigeria. For example in Cross River State there is colossal inadequate counselling by counsellors in our secondary schools. The strategies for counseling already exist in secondary schools, but failed to be adequately utilized by counsellors. Therefore the researcher wants to strengthen these strategies. The strategies are: strategies of praising the students for positive achievement made, establishing warm interpersonal relationship with the learning disabilities students, using positive reinforcement to motivate the learning disabilities and inculcating assertiveness skills through group counseling. Data from West African Examination Council (WAEC), 2016-2020, Lagos, Chief Examiner reports results in the last decades showed that less than 30% of students with learning disabilities who have attempted examination has been able to emerge with credit pass in Mathematics and English Language.

It is because of these that the State Government of Cross River State directed its ministry of education in the year 2021 to employ at least one school counsellors for every school. Questions hadarisen regarding counsellor's capabilities in assisting students with special needs. It is against the background that this study is attempting to ascertain strategies for counseling secondary school students with learning disabilities in Cross River State.

1.2 Purpose and objectives of the study

- a) The purpose of the study if to determine the strategies used in counselling secondary school students with learning disabilities by counsellors in Cross River State of Nigeria.
- b) The objectives of the study are:
 - i. To determine strategies used by counsellors in Cross River State for counseling secondary school student with learning disabilities.

- ii. To identify personality factors hindering strategies for counselling of students with learning disabilities.

1.3 Significance/Justification of the study

Practically, the findings of the study will be beneficial to students, counsellors, special educators, curriculum planners, school heads, the government and the public at large. With the help of the study, students with disabilities will benefit immensely. This will help to reduce the number of students with learning disabilities who achieve poorly in class or drop out from school as a result of inability to learn.

The study will provide essential information to school counsellors on the best strategies to be adopted for the counseling of secondary school students with learning disabilities. It will provide counsellors with a catalogue of strategies they could use.

This study will provide an enabling environment for special educators to use the various strategies in the classroom so as to achieve his/her objectives. It will also integrate these students into the regular classrooms and providing solutions to their individual differences.

1.4 Research Questions

The following research question are formulated to guide the guide the study

- 1) What are the strategies used by counsellors in Cross River State for counseling secondary school students with learning disability.
- 2) What are the personalities factors hindering counseling of students with learning disabilities.

1.5 Scope of the Study

The study was carried out in Cross River State of Nigeria. The study examines strategies for counselling secondary school students with learning disabilities in Cross River State. The study focused mainly to determine strategies used by counsellors in Cross River State for counselling secondary school students, with learning disabilities and also ascertain whether gender difference exist between strategies used by the counsellors in counselling students with learning disabilities.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

Some theories were chosen to serve as the framework of the study: They include:

- 1) Behavioural Counselling Theory by [18].
- 2) Cognitive Learning Theory by [17].

2.1.1 Behavioural Counselling Theory by [18]

Behavioural counselling theory is association with behavior modification which consist of a systematic and scientific method of bringing a desirable behavioural change.

The major tenets of behaviourism are that all behavior is learned whether the behaviour is maladaptive or adaptive. This theory believes that adaptive behavior can be learned to replace maladaptive behavior.

In order to achieve the desired behavioural change, counsellors make use of certain learning models, [8]: conditioning, reinforcement, social modeling, role modeling, systemic desensitization, simulation conditioning: A process whereby a relationship between stimulus and responses are created. There is operant and classical conditioning reinforcement: This is a situation where a behavior is repeated as a result of an event.

2.1.2 Cognitive Learning Theory (Education) by [17]

Cognitive learning theory is a conceptual framework that describes how information is absorbed, processed, and retained during learning. It was propounded in Berlin by a German psychologist,[17].Cognitivist, as a learning theory is the theory that humans generate knowledge and meaning through sequential development of an individual's cognitive abilities: Such as the mental processes of recognition, recollection, analysis, reflection, application, creation, understanding and evaluation.

The theory has been used to explain mental processes as they are influenced by both intrinsic and extrinsic factors, which eventually bring about learning in an individual. The Cognitivist posits that the memory system is an active organized processor of information and that prior knowledge plays an important role in learning. They view learning as an internal mental process (including insight) information processing, memory and reception.

2.2 Conceptual framework

2.2.1 Learning disabilities

Learning disabilities is an umbrella term used to refer to category of exceptional children with heterogeneous group of learning disorders. According to [2], the problem of learning disabled children may extend to non-academic skills and such skills may be those needed for performance of assigned task related to social subjects, social and behavioural competence. The difficulty in learning is not caused primarily by the presence of any disability such as the usual hearing, mental retardation etc. [13], observed and summarized various conditions of the learning disabled children as follows:

- Such child has disorder in one or more area of basic psychological processes – mental, such as memory, auditory perception, visual perception, tactical perception, oral language and thinking.
- The child has difficulty in learning especially in speaking, listening, writing reading and word recognition skills comprehension, mathematics, calculations and reasoning.
- A serve discrepancy existing between the child's apparent potential for learning and his low level of achievement. In other words, there are evidences of under achievement.

Individuals with learning disabilities can face unique challenges that are often pervasive throughout the life span. Depending on the type and severity of the disability, inventions, and current technologies may be used to help the individual learn strategies that will foster future success. Some interventions can be quite simplistic, while others are intricate and complex. Current technologies may require students training to be effective classroom supports. Teachers, parents and schools can create plans together that factor intervention and accommodations to aid the individuals in successfully becoming independent learners.

Students with learning disabilities are very heterogeneous, meaning that no two students possess the identical profile of strengths and weaknesses. One student may have a deficit in just one area while another may exhibit deficits in numerous areas however they are eligible for special education and related services only if they exhibit average intellectual functioning and if they exhibit the following characteristics: academic problems, disorders of attention, poor motor abilities, psychological process deficits and information-processing problems, lack of cognitive strategies needed for efficient learning, oral language difficulties, reading difficulties, written language problems, mathematical disorders, social skill deficits.

It is worth noting that not all students will exhibit these characteristics, and many pupils who demonstrate these same behaviors are successful in the classroom. For students with a learning disability, it is the quantity, intensity, and duration of these behaviors that lead to problems in school and elsewhere. It should also be noted that boys are four times more likely to be labeled with a learning disability than girls. The reason for this has not yet been determined by researchers [15], [9].

2.2.2 Guidance and Counselling Strategies

The learning disabilities can benefit from guidance and counselling strategies provided by school counsellors. Counsellors can conduct individual and group counselling to help students improve classroom behaviour, increase self –

esteem, and develop positive interpersonal relationships [6]; [10]; [9]. Including those students in peer facilitation programs can encourage peer interaction and help to foster social acceptance and self-confidence [10], in addition, counsellors can promote awareness and an understanding of the unique needs of this population by advocating on their behalf to school and community representative,[16].

It is important for parents to develop an accurate picture of the child's giftedness and learning disability [17]. Therefore, they can benefit from special meetings planned for the purpose of providing opportunities to vent and discuss feelings of anger and frustration that often result from parenting these special children [4].

Counsellors can teach study skills individually or in groups to promote self-discipline and positive study habits. Information on effective methods for note-taking, summarizing reading content, memorizing and reviewing and studying.

3. Research Method

The research design for the study was descriptive survey design. The design is appropriate for the study because the strategies for counselling students with learning disabilities was studied and described without any manipulation.

3.1 Area of the Study

The study area is Cross River State Nigeria. It is located in the South eastern angle of the South – South Zone of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. It lies between latitude 50° 32' and 4° 27' North of the equator and latitude 7° 50' River State and 9° 28' East of the Greenwich Meridian.

3.2 Population/Sample of the Study

The population of the study comprises of all the counsellors in the public secondary schools of Cross River State. All the two hundred counsellors in the public secondary schools in Cross River State were used for the study. The Slavins' formula was used in determination of 246 as sample size. The study adopted simple random sampling and every Counsellor in the public secondary schools of Cross River State has an equal chance of being selected for the study.

3.3 Instrument and Methods of Data Collection

A well-structured questionnaire named, counselling strategies for learning disabilities (CSLD) was used in collecting data on learning disabilities of the subject. The researcher with five research assistant administered the instruments and collected the questionnaire from counsellors.

3.4 Method of Data Analysis

The data collected was analyzed using mean, standard deviation, ANOVA and T-test of independence. Hypothesis one was tested using one way ANOVA.

4. Results and Discussion

This study was aimed at assessing strategies for counselling secondary school students with learning disabilities in Cross River State. This goal was accomplished through the analysis of data collected and the result is as presented below.

4.1 General Description of Data

We present the results of data analysis based on the two research questions and two hypotheses that guided the study. The result is as presented in tables according to the individual research questions and hypotheses the major findings of the study are also presented.

Research Question I: What are the strategies used by counsellors in Cross River State for counselling secondary school students with learning disabilities?

Table 1: Mean ratings and standard deviation of respondents on strategies used by counselors in Cross river state for counselling secondary school students with learning disabilities

S/N	Items on strategies for counselling	X̄	Std. Dev.	Remark
1.	Praising students for position achievement made	3.76	0.62	Agree
2.	Using positive reinforcement to motivate the student with learning disabilities	3.54	0.85	Agree
3.	Using parental forum to educate parents on the counselling of students with learning disabilities	3.65	0.85	Agree
4.	Establishing warm interpersonal relationship with the learning disabilities student	3.22	0.96	Agree
5.	Boosting the student self-esteem through exhibiting warm acceptance	3.62	0.82	Agree
6.	Fostering social acceptance among the students through peer facilitation programme	3.84	0.52	Agree
7.	Inculcating communication skills to enhance the student social interaction	3.81	0.59	Agree
8.	Appreciating the strengths and weakness of students with learning disabilities during counselling process	3.54	0.90	Agree
9.	Inculcating assertiveness skills through group counsellings'	3.96	0.23	Agree
10.	Use of behavior modification	3.67	0.84	Agree
	Total	3.66	0.71	Agree
n = 246; Criterion mean = 2.50				

Table: The result reveals that the respondents agreed to all the items (1, 2, 3,4,5,6,7,8,9 and 10) as being strategies used by counsellors in Cross River State for counselling secondary school students with learning disabilities. This is because the mean scores are above the criterion mean of 2.50. This implies that the respondents did not disagree with any of the items as not being a strategy used by counsellors in Cross River State for counselling secondary students with learning disabilities.

Research Question 2: What are the personality factors hindering counselling of students with learning disabilities?

Table 2: Mean rating and standard deviation of respondents on personality factors hindering counseling of student with learning disabilities

S/N	Items on strategies for counselling	X	Std. Dev.	Remark
1.	Counsellors lack professional training	3.40	0.98	Agree
2.	Counsellors lack motivation in form of incentives	3.50	0.83	Agree
3.	Counsellors do not maintain confidentiality	3.50	0.85	Agree
4.	Counsellors experience negative attitude from school authorities	3.54	0.77	Agree
5.	Counsellors experience religious difference with counselee	3.45	0.89	Agree
6.	Counsellors carry out a lot of responsibilities	3.36	1.01	Agree
7.	Counsellors are too old to counsel students	3.22	1.04	Agree
8.	Counsellors do not have required skills needed for counselling	3.65	0.62	Agree
9.	There is lack of adequate counsellors to deliver services	3.39	0.98	Agree
10.	Counsellor abuse students sexually	3.57	0.79	Agree
Total		3.48	0.88	Agree
n = 246; Criterion mean = 2.50				

Table 2: The respondents agreed that personality factor hinder counselling of students with learning disabilities. This is because the mean scores of 3.40, 3.50, 3.50, 3.54, 3.45, 3.36, 3.22, 3.65, 3.39 and 3.57 are above the criterion mean of 2.50. This implies that personality factors hinder counselling of students with learning disabilities. Moreover, the overall mean value of 3.48 shows that the respondents have understanding of personality factors hindering counselling of student with learning disabilities.

Hypothesis one

There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female counsellors on strategies used in Cross River State.

Table 3: ANOVA of the significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female counsellors on strategies used in Cross river state

Source of Variations	Sum of Square	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1.072	3	0.3573	4.0648	.001
Within Groups	21.280	242	0.0879		
Total	22.352	245			

Table 3: Shows ANOVA result on the difference in mean ratings of respondents on male and female counsellors on strategies used in Cross River State. The result of the ANOVA showed an f – ratio of 4.0648 with the significant value of 0.0001 since the significant value is less than 0.05 set-as level of significance, the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that there is a significant difference on the mean ratings of male and female counsellors on strategies used in Cross River State.

Hypothesis two

There is no significant difference in the mean rating of male and female counsellor on personality factors hindering counselling.

Table 4: t-test analysis of the mean rating of male and female counsellors on personality factors hindering counselling

Group	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	D.F	t-cal.	sig. (2) tailed
Female	130	3.75	0.48	244	0.974	0.331
Males	116	3.68	0.55			

The analysis in table 4 shows the t-cal. Value to be 0.974 and the probability value of 0.331 is greater than the .05 level of significance and 244 Degree of Freedom. The null hypothesis is accepted meaning that there is no significant difference in the mean rating of male and female counsellors on personality factors hindering counselling.

4.2 Discussion of Findings

Strategies used by Counselors in Cross River State for Counseling Secondary School Students with Learning Disabilities

With reference to research question one which was on strategies used by counsellors’ in Cross River State for counselling secondary school student with learning disabilities. The respondents held the view that praising students for positive achievement made, using positive reinforcement to motivate the students using parental forum to educate parents on the counselling of student with learning disabilities, establishing warm interpersonal relationship with the learning disabilities students.

The strategies also include: inculcating communication skills to enhance the student’s social interaction, appreciating the strengths and weakness of students with learning disabilities during counselling process. These findings of [6] and [17], which showed that counsellors can conduct individual and group counselling to help students improve classroom behavior, increase self-esteem, and develop positive inter personal relationships. Including the students in peer facilitation programs can encourage peer interaction and help to foster social acceptance and self-confidence [10].

Personality Factors Hindering Counselling of Students with Learning Disabilities

The findings of the study as reflected in table 2 which was on personality factors hindering counselling of students with learning disabilities. The respondents held the views that lack of professional training by counsellors, lack of motivation in form of incentives and inability to maintain confidentiality by counsellors, negative attitude from school authority as well

as counsellors experience religious differences with counselee. The findings also agree with the findings of [1], who asserted that lack of professional training on the part of counsellor may have negative impact on student at the receiving end of such services since such counsellors do not know the essential elements and core conditions of counselling, they cannot counsel effectively.

5. Summary and Conclusion

The strategies used by counsellors in Cross River State for counselling secondary school students with learning disabilities include: Praising them for positive achievement made, using positive reinforcement to motivate the students with learning disabilities, using parental forum to educate parents on the counselling of students with learning disabilities, establishing warm interpersonal relationship with the learning disabilities.

Personality factors hindering counselling of students with learning disabilities include: lack of professional training by counsellors, lack of motivation in form of incentives and counsellors do not maintain confidentiality.

5.1 Recommendations

- Guidance Counsellors, Counseling Association of Nigeria should ensure that there are guidance counselors' forum to review strategies for counseling students with learning disabilities and government should make adequate funds available for counseling services.
- Counsellors' should obtain knowledge and training for counselling students with L.Ds. and exceptional needs through counselling workshops, consultation, supervision, current therapeutic literature and community services.
- Counsellors' should collaborate with other related support professionals such as; school psychologist, physical therapist, occupational therapist, special education staff, and speech and language pathologist in the delivery of their services.
- Counsellor' should school counselling curriculum lessons, individual and/or group counselling to students with L.Ds., within the scope of the comprehensive school counselling program.
- Counsellors' should encourage family in the educational process of their children.
- Counsellors' should consult and collaborate with staff and families to understand the L.Ds. of students and understanding the adaptation and modification needed to assist the students.

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