

An Investigation of the Relationship between Counselling Services and Adjustment of School-aged Children–in-Transition in Junior Secondary Schools in Ogun State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The crux of this study is to examine the role of counselling services in fostering adjustment of school-aged children-in-transition in junior secondary schools in Ogun state, Nigeria. Using simple random and purposive sampling technique, three hundred samples (males= 133 and females=167) of school-aged children with mean age 10.96 participated in the study. Respondents filled two standardized instruments which are School Counselling Services Scale (SCSS) and Student Adjustment Scale (SAS). Data were analysed using Pearson product moment correlation and t-test at 0.05 level of significance. Result revealed that counselling services was perceived to be an effective tool in fostering adjustment of school-aged children–in-transition in junior secondary schools. Consequent upon this, government, policy makers as well as school counsellors should ensure the efficient and effective delivery of counselling services in secondary schools for new students transitioning from primary schools to junior secondary schools.

Keywords: *Adjustment, school-aged children in-transition, gender, counselling services.*

For school-aged children, entering into secondary school is a social and academic turning point. It is a crossroad that encompasses increased expectation of independent academic performance with little or no teachers' supervision, new methodology of instruction, and conformity to stricter rules, values, culture and traditions. Thus, it is both an opportunity and a challenge for majority of the school-aged children transitioning from primary to junior secondary schools because they are in a developmental stage referred to as adolescence. This stage is accompanied with "storm and stress" with experiences such as distrust, anxiety, pessimism and egocentrism.

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development in 2011 defined transition as a period of change that can be both challenging and exciting, in which children and

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An Investigation of the Relationship between Counselling Services and Adjustment of School-aged Children-in-Transition in Junior Secondary Schools in Ogun State, Nigeria

families adjust to new roles, identities and expectations, new interactions and relationships (Hanewald, 2013). Adjustment is a process by which students' in transition maintains a balance between their needs and environment. It entails students struggle and efforts to survive and maintain harmonious relationships with their social and physical environment. Robinson (2009) noted that the adjustment process is a way in which the individual attempts to deal with stress, tensions, conflict and meet his or her needs.

Jackson (2010) submitted that students experience transition into secondary schools in different ways, for almost all of them, the change from a familiar environment into an unfamiliar one represents a period of disequilibrium. Wintre and Yaffe (2000) found adjustment difficulties to be the most common problems among new students. West, Sweeting and Young (2010) discovered that 85% of students who participated in their study had adjustment difficulties to both school and peer social systems at the beginning of secondary school. In a research carried out on the overall adjustment of some selected students by Abdulla, Elias, Mahyuddin and Uli (2009), 4% of the respondents were in the high category, 70% moderate category while 26% were in the low category for overall adjustment.

The disruptive nature of the transition process means that previously-learned behaviour patterns need to be adapted to new demands and more challenging environments and this may have a strong negative impact on peer relations and the students' academic achievement (Ding, 2008). Poor students' adjustment could lead to loss of self-esteem, poor academic performance, rising anxiety and depression levels (psychological problems) and lack of social acceptance (Frey, Ruchkin, Martin & Schwab-Stone, 2009; Marston, 2008; Akos, 2006); behavioural problems, discordant educational aspirations and school dropout (Vasalampi, Salmela-Aro & Nurmi, 2009 and Raju & Rahamtulla 2007) and difficulty with development of peer relationships (Rumberger, Larson, Ream, & Palardy, 1999). Students with low self-esteem could have more negative school transition experiences, which may lead to lower levels of academic attainment and higher levels of psychological problems such as depression and anxiety. Anxious students are prone to experience peer victimization and thus, poorer transition which may lead to anti-social behaviours (Adeusi, Adekeye & Babalola, 2015).

Raju and Rahamtulla (2007) discovered that adjustment of school children is primarily dependent on the school variables like school facilities, the medium of instruction, available school programmes and school management. School programmes such as counselling services could be used to enhance smooth transition of school-aged children into secondary school. School counselling programme are services rendered by trained school counsellors to assists students in harmonizing their talents, abilities, interests, values, strengths and weaknesses to be able to develop their full potentials. Counselling services enables clients to make choices that are intended to bring self-direction and adjustment. It is designed to help students (counselee) adjust meaningfully to the environment, develop the ability to set realistic goals and improve on total educational programmes.

An Investigation of the Relationship between Counselling Services and Adjustment of School-aged Children-in-Transition in Junior Secondary Schools in Ogun State, Nigeria

Based on the documented prevalence and consequences of poor adjustment of students, it is imperative to foster students' adjustment. Hence, the submission that counselling services could enhance students' adjustment needed to be confirmed. Researchers have linked some variables to students' adjustment; teacher-student relationship (Hughes, 2012), academic achievement and gender (Winga, Agak & Ayere, 2011), social acceptance (Chedzoy & Burden, 2005). To the best of the knowledge of the researchers, studies that looked into the dynamic role of school counselling services in fostering students' adjustment were few and are carried out in foreign countries. This study intends to break new grounds by carrying out a survey research on the relationship between counselling services and adjustment of school-aged children-in-transition in junior secondary schools in Ogun state. Therefore, an understanding of the relationship between counselling services and adjustment of school-aged children would facilitate more effective and efficient school counselling services that could enhance adjustment and the overall well-being of students.

In the current study, adjustment is a process by which student-in-transition adapt to, cope with, manage the problems, challenges and demands of everyday life. This encompasses four major areas which are: academic adjustment, social adjustment, personal-emotional adjustment and institutional attachment. Students transitioning from primary to junior secondary school are faced with adjustment problem in school which includes changes in teachers (that is different teachers for each subject), larger class size, stricter school and class rules as well as procedures, performance expectations, difficulty of the work, and peer acceptance. Successful negotiation of these challenges would predict academic excellence. Birch and Ladd (1996) noted that students' adjustment is an important factor in predicting outcomes which is also crucial to future achievements. Well-adjusted students usually have value for what they are learning, are usually involved in classroom activities and have high grades. On the other hand, failure to adjust could lead to mental health issues and school dropout which may require counselling services.

Academic adjustment is considered to be the expression of the positive reaction of students to the formative pressure of school. Classes may be larger, each subject teacher has different teaching styles, assignments are lengthier and standards are higher. Social Adjustment entails the students' sense of belonging, their socio-emotional functioning and level of well-being. According to Cueto, Guerrero, Sugimaru and Zevallos (2010), students with a low sense of belonging may feel alienated at school, which in turn may cause poor achievement and eventually dropping out of school. Ganeson and Ehrich (2009) found that transitioning students were affected by the discontinuity in peer relationships. Emotional adjustment affects academic achievement in an indirect way. Unstable and maladjusted students have been found to do less well in their studies in proportion to their intelligence than students who were well balanced. Failure to archive proper adjustment at school may be a precursor to psychological problems. Institutional attachment entails the students' commitment towards the school and its activities.

An Investigation of the Relationship between Counselling Services and Adjustment of School-aged Children-in-Transition in Junior Secondary Schools in Ogun State, Nigeria

School guidance and counselling is one of the educational services recognized in the Federal Republic of Nigeria National Policy of Education (2004) to facilitate the implementation of the educational policy, the attainment of policy goals and promotion of effectiveness of educational system. The programme is expected to make learning experiences more meaningful for school-aged children. According to Esen (1998), guidance and counselling is aimed primarily at assisting the counsellee (students) to discover hidden strengths and ultimately grow in independence and being able to take own decisions, make choices or adjustment unaided. Olayinka in Egbo (2009) asserts that guidance programmes should help counsellee (students) in reaching two goals: adjustment to society, and freedom to act as unique individuals.

Orientation service is one of the school counselling programme which is designed to assist students adjust to new school environment and experiences during critical transition period. This is because the school is new in environmental features and other characteristics which may be confusing to new students. Students are enlighten on techniques of note-taking which may involve dictation from the teachers rather than copying directly from the board, meeting more teachers for various subjects because apart from their class teachers, they are being taught by different subject teachers. Also, the school rules and regulation as well as the penalty of non-compliance are brought to the consciousness of the new students.

Information are provided to students concerning duration for present or future relevant educational programmes, location of classes, teachers' staff rooms, principal office, counsellor's office, school clinic, library, dining hall, school vendors, school time-table, study techniques, test and examination preparation tips, test-taking skills so as to help them in their adjustment efforts and feel emotionally secure. This is often referred to as information service in the school counselling programme. Also, personal –social information are provided because most of the students-in-transition are in their early adolescence, they need information about the physical and biological changes in their body, peer relationship and acceptance, dating as well as how to achieve healthy personal characteristics. The school counsellor provide data on sex information, physical and mental health development, personal appearance, social behaviours, games for relaxation and leisure time activities.

Counselling service is aimed at enhancing the potentials, overall functioning and total development of students. Counselling service entails the use of different approaches in either individual or group counselling to assist students with personal, social and emotional problems, understand their needs, feelings values, attitudes, strengths and weaknesses, enhance self-concept, relationship with others in order to become self-directed individuals. Thus, counselling service is rendered in relation to the developmental needs of the students. According to Durojaiye in Egbo (2015), the developmental needs of youth are attaining individuality, making progress towards an organized personality pattern, developing philosophy of life, developing a concept of values and desirable behaviour, establishing deep

An Investigation of the Relationship between Counselling Services and Adjustment of School-aged Children-in-Transition in Junior Secondary Schools in Ogun State, Nigeria

personal relationships with both sexes and learning to adjust to changes resulting from physical growth.

Adeusi, Adekeye and Babalola (2015) carried out a research on the influence of guidance and counselling on students motivation and school adjustment among 289 new students. The study discovered that guidance and counselling significantly influences students' adjustment to school. Participants of the study who participated in guidance and counselling service offered were more adjusted than those who did not participate. A research on the impact of more fully implemented guidance programs on the school experiences of high school students was conducted by Lapan, Gysbers and Sun (1997). The study revealed that those students who have access to counselling programmes reported being more adjusted, positive and having greater feelings of belonging and safety in their various schools.

In a study, Waters, Cross and Shaw (2010) using the data of 5,159 Year 8 students from 39 randomly-selected schools in Western Australia found that participants connectedness to secondary school was a significant predictor of academic and health outcomes. Higher connectedness to school was related to fewer classroom and peer problems, fewer emotional problems and greater pro-social skills. Furthermore, researchers reported that these students also had less difficulty in the actual transition itself, all of which was caused by the schools giving priority to pastoral care strategies and focusing on helping students to achieve academically.

Raju and Rahamtulla (2007) conducted a study on adjustment problems among students using a sample of 461 students (197 boys, 264 girls) from urban and rural areas of Visakhapatnam district, Andhra Pradesh. The finding of the study was that adjustment of school children is determined by their gender. Winga, Agak and Ayere (2011) carried out a research on the relationship among school adjustment, gender and academic achievement amongst secondary school students in Kisumu district, Kenya among 450 secondary school students. Result of the study showed that there were no significant differences between girls and boys in school adjustment.

This study is anchored on Person-Centered Theory developed by Carl Rogers in 1942. The core tenet of Person-Centered approach is that counselling is a relationship, by which the counsellor helps the counsellee (student) to cope better with the problems of living so as to become healthy and psychologically balance. The theory considered counselling service to be the one in which the counsellors has the intent of promoting the growth, development, maturity and improved functioning of the counsellees (students) despite the societal and personal demands placed upon them.

Person-Centered Theory emphasized that human interaction between the counsellor and the counsellee (student) is drive towards growth, health and adjustment. Counselling is aimed at greater independence and integration of the individual; the individual is the focus, the aim

An Investigation of the Relationship between Counselling Services and Adjustment of School-aged Children-in-Transition in Junior Secondary Schools in Ogun State, Nigeria

being to assist him or her to grow, to cope with present or future problems in a more integrated fashion (Rogers, 1942). The theory is applicable to the current study because one of the aims of school counselling service is to enhance the adjustment of new students transitioning from primary to secondary school.

Purpose of the study

The main purpose of the study is to determine the relationship between school counselling services and adjustment of school-aged children-in-transition in junior secondary schools. Specifically, the research proffered answers to the following research hypotheses:

1. There is no significant relationship between counselling services and adjustment of school-aged children-in-transition in junior secondary schools.
2. There is no significant difference in the male and female students perception of counselling services in fostering adjustment of school-aged children-in-transition in junior secondary schools.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design of correlational type. The population comprised all school-aged children-in-transition in public junior secondary schools in Ado-Odo/Ota and Ifo Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Ogun State.

A sample of 16 schools was drawn from the 31 public secondary schools in the two selected local government areas of Ogun state through the process of simple random sampling technique. For convenience, the researchers employed the purposive sampling technique to select 20 participants from each of the sixteen schools in the two selected local government areas. Out of the 320 questionnaires distributed, 13 were not properly filled and 7 were found missing, in all three hundred school-aged children from 8 schools in Ado-Odo/Ota, and 8 schools in Ifo Local Government Areas of Ogun state participated in the study. Participants were 133 males and 167 females and their mean age is 10.96 years.

The researchers obtained approval from the authorities of the sixteen secondary schools used for the study through the Ministry of Education. Thereafter, the researchers and two trained research assistants went round the selected schools to distribute questionnaires to the students. The purpose of the research and how to complete the questionnaires was explained to the students. They were told that the research is mainly for those transitioning from primary school to junior secondary school (That is, newly admitted junior secondary school students) and therefore those students repeating junior secondary school 1(JSS1) were excluded from the study. In each of the schools, the administration and collection of instruments was done on the same day.

Measures

Two standardized instruments were used for data collection namely; School Counselling Services Scale (SCSS) and Student Adjustment Scale (SAS)

An Investigation of the Relationship between Counselling Services and Adjustment of School-aged Children-in-Transition in Junior Secondary Schools in Ogun State, Nigeria

1. School Counselling Services Scale (SCSS)

School counselling Services scale was adopted from Student Perceptions of School Counsellor Functions Scale developed by Erford (2003). The scale was used in measuring students' perceptions of the school counsellors' roles and services. It consists of 20 items with a response format ranging from 1-Not important to 5-Extremely important. It was trial-tested for the purpose of this research using Pearson correlation and reliability coefficient of $r=0.67$ was obtained.

2. Student Adjustment Scale(SAS)

Student Adjustment Scale (SAS) was adapted from Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ) developed by Baker and Siryk (1984). SAS is a self-report instrument designed to assess the student's adjustment. Four aspects of students' adjustment are measured: academic adjustment which measures how well the new students manages to meet the educational demands of the secondary school experience; social adjustment which measures how well the new students deals with interpersonal experiences at school; personal-emotional adjustment which indicates whether the new student experiences psychological or somatic symptoms of distress; institutional attachment which measures student commitment towards the school as an institution. The total of the above four sub-scales yields a full-scale score, which is an index of the overall adjustment to school. For the purpose of this study, the reliability coefficient obtained after test-retest using Pearson Correlation was 0.81.

Method of Data Analysis

Data was analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) and t-test at 0.05 level of significance. Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used for research hypothesis one while t-test was used for research hypothesis two.

RESULTS

The result obtained on the research hypotheses were presented in Table 1 and 2

Table 1: PPMC summary showing significant relationship between counselling services and adjustment of school-aged children in-transition.

Variable	Mean	SD	DF	N	R	p	Remark
Adjustment	43.72	18.37	298	300	.634	.000	Significant
Counselling services	15.96	5.07					

The table 1 indicates that there is significant relationship between adjustment of school-aged children in-transition and counselling services($r= .634$; $p<0.05$).

Table 2: Summary of t-test showing the significant difference in the male and female students perception of counselling services in fostering adjustment

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Std. Error	DF	t-cal	p	Remark
Male	133	67.44	9.67	5.44	298	8.35	.065	Not Significant
Female	167	69.56	10.90	4.02				

An Investigation of the Relationship between Counselling Services and Adjustment of School-aged Children-in-Transition in Junior Secondary Schools in Ogun State, Nigeria

Table 2 shows that there was no significant difference in the male and female students perception of counselling services in fostering adjustment of school-aged children in-transition ($t= 8.35$; $df= 298$; $p>0.05$).

The mean value from table 2 further revealed that there is no difference in the male students' perception of counselling services in fostering adjustment with their female counterparts. This is an indication that gender of the students has no significant influence on the perception of counselling services in fostering adjustment.

DISCUSSION

Research hypothesis one examined if there is significant relationship between adjustment of school-aged children in-transition and counselling services. The result from table one shows that there was significant relationship between adjustment of school-aged children in-transition and counselling services. This corroborates the findings of Adeusi, Adekeye and Babalola (2015); Waters, Cross and Shaw (2010) and Lapan, Gysbers and Sun (1997) that school counselling services significantly influences student adjustment. The possible explanation could be because school counselling service is an essential educational support programme that assists students to grow and develop in order to meet demands, both societal and personal which are placed upon them.

The result of research hypothesis two on the difference in the male and female students' perception of counselling services in fostering adjustment of school-aged children –in-transition was presented in Table 2. Result reveals that there is no significant difference in the male and female students' perception of counselling services in fostering adjustment. This is in consonance with the earlier findings of Winga, Agak and Ayere (2011) that there is no significant differences between girls and boys school adjustment. This result is so because there is no gender discrimination in school counselling programme, individual needs are being addressed without gender bias. Guidance and counselling service is for all and could either be rendered through group or individual interaction. Thus, male and female students have same perception of the role of school counselling service in fostering adjustment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From the findings of this research the following recommendations were made;

1. Government through the ministry of education should give more recognition to counselling services as essential and of necessity in secondary education. They should ensure that each secondary school has a functional guidance and counselling unit with professional school counsellors as Head of the unit.
2. Counsellors should design and implement transition programme as well as strategies to assists new students in some of the pressures they are faced with.
3. School counsellors should help the students not only with issues relating to academic but other challenges which may be emotional, behavioural and personal-social that they may

An Investigation of the Relationship between Counselling Services and Adjustment of School-aged Children-in-Transition in Junior Secondary Schools in Ogun State, Nigeria

be confronting. This would promote the all-round development of each student in the school.

4. The school should provide a conducive counselling environment where qualitative guidance and counselling service could be rendered to students.

CONCLUSION

The need for youths to live functional and meaningful lives makes school guidance and counselling programme imperative. It is well adjusted youths that are believed to drive a strong internationally competitive economy compared with their poorly adjusted counterparts (Lapsley & Edgerton, 2000). Secondary school students are at a very crucial stage of their lives wherein they are still in the process of exploring their place and role in society. It is at this stage that their adjustment needed to be enhanced. The study discovered that school counselling programme is effective in fostering adjustment of school-aged children in transition in junior secondary schools.

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An Investigation of the Relationship between Counselling Services and Adjustment of School-aged Children-in-Transition in Junior Secondary Schools in Ogun State, Nigeria

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An Investigation of the Relationship between Counselling Services and Adjustment of School-aged Children-in-Transition in Junior Secondary Schools in Ogun State, Nigeria

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