



Essential Counselling Skills Needed For Helping Under-Achieve Succeed Among Secondary School Students

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ABSTRACT: The study is carried out in Anambra state. The researchers adopted descriptive survey design for this study. A sample size of 147 Counsellors who are willing to participate in the study is drawn through accidental sampling techniques from the areas of their meetings. A four rated scale of strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed and strongly disagreed questionnaire developed by the researchers on Essential Counselling Skills Needed for Helping Under-achieve Succeed Among secondary school Students in Anambra State (QOECSSNFHUASSASSIAS) is used for data collection. Test retest is used to establish the reliability coefficient of the instrument and the value is 0.80 which the researchers considered to be high enough for the study. On the spot administration of the instrument is adopted by the researchers to ensure a hundred percent return. The data collected is analyzed using the weighted arithmetic mean and ranking. The cutoff point regarding an item being in existence as in agreed or not agreed is 2.50. Any item that is below 2.50 is regarded as not being in existence and the result is presented in a table. Among other things the result revealed the following as some of the essential skills needed by professional counsellors for helping the under-achieved succeed in secondary schools: Communicating, tolerance, compassionate, Listening, note taking, empathic understanding, non-judgmental and stress management skills. The researchers recommended that Training needs of teacher-counsellors and career masters on counselling skills for helping students achieve their potentials in life for a better result since they also handle some of the students issues needs to be highlighted by the Secondary school Education Commission. And also, government should be funding such trainings so that lack of money will not prevent them from attending.

KEY WORDS: Counsellors, Essential, Skills, Under-achievers and school.

INTRODUCTION

There is no perfect personality in this world. Everybody including adult, youth or children is experiencing one problem or the other in life. The reality is that no matter whom a person is, there is a problem itching him in one aspect of his life. Among the students in the school, some are of higher achievers while others are under-achievers. Among the educational problems facing secondary school students is underachievement.

Mandel & Marcus (2009) opine that underachievement is a common problem in school children and some researchers have studied it some years back to proffer solutions but yet the problem still persists. Eke & Otubo (2020) view underachievement as a child's role in cognitive, intellectual inabilities, academic, psychological disorder and behavioural field. Ogonnia (2012) in his opinion states that an underachieving student is a student who shows a significant difference between his academic performances, intelligence, and abilities. That is, they have high intelligence and talent but show poor academic performance (Barbara, 2009). Studies suggest that 10%–15% of students are classified as academic underachievement (Delisle & Berger 2009). This abnormally is easily noticed within children when they are given a lot of assignments to accomplish especially those which will make them to plan and take decisions on their own. These students' academic achievements are below expectations in comparison with their potential (Launch Pad. 2006). There is usually a significant performance departure from what is expected of them. This departure is occasioned by the interplay of several factors, including family, school, personal, and peer factors (Nomaan, Hanif, & Rehna, 2016). Other researchers note that performance below achievement expectation is linked to deficient study habits, attitude, interest, and time management (Ghadirzadeh et al., 2013; Suan, 2014). These factors have been summarized as socio-psychological, family-related, peer-related and school-related (Launch Pad 2006).



Also, Çakir's (2014) study involving gifted students who are underperforming indicated that underachievers have low self-perception, low attitude toward their teacher and school, low motivation and goal valuation when they are compared to high achievers. As common as the problem is in schools, researchers have only recently come to agree that a single definition of the term underachievement seems unattainable (Smith, 2003; Gallagher, 2005).

However, Eke & Otubo (2020) identify sluggishness of some students, inadequate study time, family issues and doubt as part of the causes of underachieve among students. Also, Taghinejad, Abedi & Yarmohammadiyan (2019) opionate that introvert from the side of the student, lack of confidence, and peer group influence are some of the contributing factors underachieve. Still on the likely causes of underachieve children, On causes of underachievers, a study carried out by Nwosu, Okoye, & Onah (2013) on an Interpretive Descriptive Study of Factors Affecting Academic Achievement of Underachieving Student Teachers in Nigeria Reported incompetence of student teachers in Nigeria has become a national concern. However, little has been done to explore the mitigating factors to student teachers' academic success, especially from the generic qualitative approach. The present study adopted the interpretive descriptive qualitative design to examine factors affecting the academic achievement of underachieving student teachers in a Nigerian university. Semi-structured interviews were employed in the data generation process. The study sample included 30 underachieving student teachers in the Department of Educational Foundations who were enrolled in the English/Education option. Using thematic content analysis, researchers reported factors such as lecturers' pedagogical incompetence, noisy and inadequate classrooms/libraries, negative influences from friends, students' lack of motivation and interest, procrastination, poor study habits, laziness and distractions, poor socio-economic background, and parental pressure contributed to students' underachievement. These factors were categorized as school, peer, personal, and home-related. Study results indicated that the interplay of forces outside the mental abilities of the students may have impeded their academic success, deepening their understanding that underachievement may not necessarily result from low mental ability in secondary school.

There is a likelihood that perhaps, these student are not being appropriately motivated or be motivated by beliefs and behaviours that undermine their academic achievement. Taghinejad (2019) suggests three important reasons why some students succeed less than expected and they are lack of motivation for school-based learning, environments that do not nurture their talents, and neuropsychological problems (learning disorders, attention deficit, memory deficit, and executive dysfunction). Johnsen (2012) considers high levels of exhaustion, lack of motivation and even dropping out among students also as factors for poor academic performance. Academic engagement could positively predict academic performance. In fact, academic engagement is a behavior (e.g., planning and perseverance) which gives the person some energy and interest to attend in school activities (Ritchotte, Rubenstein, Murry 2015).

Moreover, on the major types of underachievers that exist, Eke & Otubo (2020), Delisle & Berger (2010), Marcus (2012) and Mandel and Marcus (2009) identify coasting, anxious, defiant, wheeler-dealer, identity searchers and sad underachievers. On the coasting underachievers Delisle & Berger (2010) reported that they emerge at about 9-10 years. They exhibit general contentment with themselves and life, procrastinate at home and school, give up easily, show little concern about low grades, make sincere-sounding statements about their intentions, are easily distracted from school work and seem unconcerned about the future. Anxious underachievers may have problems at any age and tend to show performance deficit of 10-20%. They tend to be tense and unable to relax, avoid school, excessively worry and are unrealistic about their competence and mistakes, need constant reassurance and approval, and may even become school-phobic (Eke & Otubo 2020). Marcus (2012) also, notes that worried or anxious underachievers are insecure, have high levels of self-doubt and experience high levels of tension. Marcus (2012) retorts that defiant underachievers are more often boys than girls before adolescence. They lose their temper easily, argue with authority figures and defy them, deliberately annoy others and blame others for their own actions or mistakes. Wheeler-dealer underachievers may be impulsive, charming or intimidating, manipulative and self-seeking and intent on instant gratification (Mandel and Marcus 2009). They tend to live for the moment and for immediate rewards, lie, cheat or steal, manipulate others, get into the same kind of trouble over and over again, and may even talk about becoming rich and famous. Identity search underachievers are so wrapped up in trying to work out who they are that they become distracted from their work (Mandel and Marcus 2009). They possess the characteristics of intense self-absorption, struggling with the question, "Who am I"?



They search for the meaning of life, are intense about everything, opinionated, and determined to be independent. They take responsibility for their own actions, behaviours and decisions and experiment with opinions, value systems, and beliefs (Eke & Otubo 2020). Delisle & Berger (2010) states that sad or depressed underachievers are depressed, have low self-esteem, find it difficult to make decisions and lack the energy needed to concentrate on school work. They appear apathetic, have poor appetites or overeat, sleep too much or have trouble sleeping, are low in energy and feel tired, have trouble concentrating and may feel hopeless and pessimistic (Mandel and Marcus 2009).

From the above, one can observe that this problem at hand obviously has a tremendous negative effects on the concerned students, families and the society at large which can never be overemphasized. Chere & Hlalele (2014) opine that the victims suffer emotional problems as a result of underachievement (or of failure) while Abu-Hamour & Al-Hmouz (2013) agreed that such Children who do not do well in school may feel ignored; feel out-of- place and also feel dumb. Snyder, Malin, Dent & Linnenbrink-Garcia (2014) state that the achievement gap negatively, affects individuals and society, students might miss out on job and career opportunities, and the family and the society also would miss out on the contributions the they might have made if there had been no gap. Adelodun (2013) and Martin (2008) equally retort that the underachieve students might face recruitment difficulties and it will become so hard for them in making a family, and the psychological effect which causes them to feel inferiority and fear of failure (Hejazi, Rastegar & Jahromy, 2008).

However, Ritchotte, Rubenstein, Murry (2015) opine that academic engagement is a behaviour (example, planning and perseverance) which would give the person some energy and interest to attend in school activities, therefore this problem of underachieve can be managed by Guidance Counsellors in schools. Some literature offers various intervention programmes or strategies designed to help underachievers to learn. From the literature, it seems that there are no unified intervention programmes for underachievers; rather there are several different approaches (Barbara 2009). Most existing intervention programmes centre on making use of punishment, positive reinforcement and motivation by the teachers. It is also clear that some programmes work while others do not. Given to the pervious findings and the need to address the issues related to underachieving students, the present study investigated the essential counselling skills needed for helping underachieved students reach their potentials in life.

Counseling is a collaborative effort between the counsellor and client. A professional counsellor is a highly-trained individual who have acquired counselling skills in the cause of his training and out of experience in the field of counselling who is also able to use a different range of counselling approaches with their clients. For Curry & Milsom (2017), a Guidance Counsellor is a professional who works in schools or other educational institutions, providing academic, personal, and career advice to students. They help examine their students' potential skills to build their self-esteem for success in their future endeavors. School guidance counsellors help students overcome problems that impede learning, well-being and development. They also, help students make the best plans and decisions regarding their life, education and future occupation. Moreover, school guidance counsellors equally help students develop and reach their full potential to live useful, happy and meaningful lives. They often implement developmentally appropriate groups and prevention-oriented activities to meet student needs and school goals. The major aim of secondary school guidance and counselling Services is to encourage students' academic, social, emotional and personal development (Chan, Fong, Luk & Ho 2017). To reach this aim, guidance and counselling services help students to know themselves better and find effective solutions to their daily problems. They also help students improve themselves in all areas and be full-functioning individuals. Counselors monitor students' development and according to their needs they give students necessary support such as helping them to understand themselves and their needs, to solve their problems, to make realistic decisions, to improve their abilities and skills, and to adjust themselves and their environment in a healthy way. In the guidance and counselling services, the student and his/her needs are in the center. While supporting him, counsellors cooperate with the administrators, teachers, parents and the other staff members when necessary. In the process of carrying out their work effectively, Counsellors make use of counselling skills.

A skill is the ability to do something that comes from training, experience, or practice. Also, Coleman & Yeh (2011) opine that a skill is the learned ability to act with determined results with good execution often within a given amount of time, energy, or both. Moreover, counselling skills are interpersonal and technical traits that a counsellor uses to better understand and listen to their clients (Eke & Otubo,



2020). Using these skills, a counsellor helps a client overcome obstacles that are preventing them from leading a happy life. These skills help counsellors build rapport, establish trust and ensure that the clients feel heard and understood. There is a big difference between a professional counsellor and a person who uses some counselling skills as part of their roles, for example as a teacher counsellor or a career master. Professional counsellors having acquired these skills during training and experiences in the field can fully utilize each of the skills in order to get what is needed from the clients while the non-professionals may not be aware of the skills, how much more applying them in the right way. On the possible counselling skills that are necessary for helping individuals overcome their problems, Eke & Otubo (2020) highlight that communicating, listening and tolerance are among the counselling skills possess by professional counsellors. Also, Coleman & Yeh (2011) state that compassionate, note-taking, having genuine interest in others' concern and empathic understanding are also, good tools in a hand of a counsellor. Furthermore, Curry & Milsom (2017) maintain that counsellors make use of non-judgmental skill, patience and they are also skillful in making use of questioning while Ritchhart & Church (2020) add dialoguing, stress management and motivating clients are part of the counsellors' skills.

RESEARCH QUESTION

One research question guided this study and it is as follows:

What are the counselling skills needed for helping under-achievers succeed among secondary school students in Anambra State.

METHODOLOGY

The study is carried out in Anambra state. The researchers adopted descriptive survey design for this study. A sample size of 147 Counsellors who are willing to participate in the study is drawn through accidental sampling techniques from the areas of their meetings. A four rated scale of strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed and strongly disagreed questionnaire developed by the researchers on Counselling Skills Needed for Helping Under-achievers Succeed in secondary schools in Anambra State (CSSNFHU-ASISSSIASQ) is used for data collection. Test retest is used to establish the reliability coefficient of the instrument and the value is 0.80 which the researchers considered to be high enough for the study. On the spot administration of the instrument is adopted by the researchers to ensure a hundred percent return. The data collected is analyzed using the weighted arithmetic mean and ranking. The cutoff point regarding an item being in existence as in agreed or not agreed is 2.50. Any item that is below 2.50 is regarded as not being in existence and the result is presented in a table.

RESULT

Table : Mean response of participants on essential counselling skills needed for helping Under-achievers

S/N	Items	Mean(X)	Ranking	Remark
1.	Communicating skill	3.51	1 st	Accepted
2.	Listening	3.44	2 nd	Accepted
3.	Tolerance	3.51	1 st	Accepted
4.	Compassionate	3.51	1 st	Accepted
5.	Note-taking	3.44	2 nd	Accepted
6.	Segregating	2.29	8 th	Not Accepted
7.	Genuine interest in others	3.35	4 th	Accepted
8.	Emphatic understanding	3.44	2 nd	Accepted
9.	Non-judgmental	3.36	3 rd	Accepted
10.	Questioning skill	3.30	5 th	Accepted
11.	Dialoguing	3.30	5 th	Accepted
12.	Punishment	2.39	7 th	Not Accepted
13.	Stress management	3.36	3 rd	Accepted
14.	Motivational skill	3.29	6 th	Accepted



The above table presents the mean and the ranking of the essential counselling skills needed for helping the under-achieved students reach their full potential in life. The above covers the opinion of the counsellors who participated in the study. Almost all the items above are accepted as the essential skills for helping the under-achieved students in secondary schools except items 6 and 12. Their means and rankings are as follows: Communicating, tolerance and compassionate 3.51 each and are 1st in ranking, Listening, note taking and empathic understanding 3.44 respectively and are 2nd in ranking, Non-judgmental and Stress management 3.36 respectively and are 3rd in ranking. Also, genuine interest in others' concern 3.35 scored 4th position in ranking, questioning and dialoguing 3.30 each came 5th in ranking and motivational skill 3.29 ranked 6th. Also, the analysis indicates that segregating and punishment 2.29 and 2.39 respectively, which scored 8th and 7th in ranking are not part of the essential counselling skills needed for helping under-achieved students.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicates the following as the essential counselling skills for helping under-achieve students reach their potentials in life: Communicating, tolerance, compassionate, Listening, note taking, empathic understanding, non-judgmental, stress management, genuine interest in others' concern, questioning and dialoguing and motivational skills while segregating and punishment for the students are rejected as being among the essential counselling skills for helping under-achievers succeed in secondary schools. The findings also indicated that counsellors do not make use of segregating and punishment in helping underachieve students succeed in secondary schools.

The findings of this study above collaborate with the findings of Eke & Otubo (2020), Coleman & Yeh (2011) Curry & Milson (2017) and that of Ritchhart & Church (2020) respectively. It indicates that teacher-counsellors and career masters can never effectively carry out counselling services for students because they are lacking in counselling skills necessary for helping students reach their full potentials in life. This is because, they are not professional counsellors that have acquired these skills through training and experiences gathered from the field. This calls for subjecting the teacher-counsellors and career masters to continuous counselling training and workshops where these skills and how to apply each will be imparted to them since they also handle students' issues for a better result.

CONCLUSION

This research work identifies counselling skills needed for helping under-achieved succeed in secondary schools in Anambra State. It has found out counselling skills needed for helping the under-achieved succeed in secondary schools which teacher-counsellors and career Masters did not have adequately.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings of this study, the authors recommended the following:

1. Training needs of teacher-counsellors and career masters on counselling skills for helping students achieve their potentials in life for a better result since they also handle some of the students issues needs to be highlighted by the Secondary school Education Commission.
2. Also, government should be funding such trainings so that lack of money will not prevent them from attending.

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Cite this Article: Uzoekwe, Helen E., Nnadi, Grace C., Nwobi Ngozika Lovina, Ofojebe, Edna N., Udeagha Francisca U. (2023). Essential Counselling Skills Needed For Helping Under-Achieve Succeed Among Secondary School Students. International Journal of Current Science Research and Review, 6(1), 432-438