

## ***Availability and Accessibility of Counselling Services among Students of Government-owned Universities***

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### **Abstract**

*This study investigated the availability and accessibility of Counselling Services in government-owned Universities in Anambra State. The study adopted the descriptive survey design. Two research questions guided the study. The sample size consisted of 450 students drawn through accidental sampling technique at lecture halls. A questionnaire titled “Questionnaire on Availability and Accessibility of Counselling Services by University Undergraduates was used for data collection which was validated by three experts in Guidance and Counselling as well as in Test and Measurement. Split-half method of estimation and Spearman Rank Difference Correlation Coefficient formula was used to establish the reliability of the instrument. The coefficient values of the instrument were 0.76 and 0.74 for items in B1 and B2 respectively. The gathered data were analysed with mean and z-test. The findings of the study indicated that there is availability of counselling services for undergraduates, and that they are accessing counselling services in school. The researchers recommended that more awareness on the counselling services available in campuses should be created so that all undergraduates both new and old will know and be accessing them whenever the need arises.*

**Keywords:** Availability, Accessibility, counselling, services, universities, undergraduates

## **Introduction**

Development of every nation seems to have anchored on education, especially university education. University education is the education that produces professionals in all aspects of human endeavour. This indicates one of the reasons why university education should not be played with, if the recipients are expected to do well, become productive in their respective areas of specialisation and also contribute meaningfully to national development. In order to fulfil this expectation, educational institutions, of which university is among, do not only provide academic needs of the students but also make provisions for the non-academic needs of students in order to develop the whole person in each of the students. One of such non-academic needs of students within academic environment is provision of counselling services that will be focusing on their academic, vocational and personal-social needs. In providing these services, professional counsellors cannot be overlooked in the task of accomplishing the expected goals set for university education in the process of national development. To develop the whole person in the students, there is need to promote all aspects of development including the physical and psychological domains of self-development, ego maturity, competence, efficacy, vocational and moral development and interpersonal conceptual growth; counselling services are needed in all of these.

Counselling is one of the educational services which aim is to help each student reach his full potentials. Modo and Inaja (2013) defined counselling as a helping relationship between the counsellor and the counsellee. It is aimed at helping the counsellee adjust properly to family, school, peer association, and society in general. However, counselling, according to Kroska and Harkness (2012), is an educational service that seeks to provide the students with opportunity to obtain holistic educational development that prepares him for functional life. Counselling from educational perspective is those experiences that help students to understand themselves, accept themselves and live effectively in their society. It is aimed primarily at assisting the receiver to discover his own hidden strengths and ultimately grow in independence and ability to take his own decisions, make choices or adjustments unaided. Counselling therefore is a programme that is being carried out by a professional whose aim is on helping an individual to define and redefined his goals and aspirations in life pursuits for greater output (Modo & Inaja, 2013).

A counsellor is one that is professionally trained in the field of counselling to help clients or students who may be in need of such help. The counsellor is a manager of a project called client. The counsellor manages the client's educational, vocational and personal-social potentials in a way that the individual becomes useful to himself and the society at large (Denga, 2012). To effectively manage his clients, the counsellor employs some professional skills such as listening, responding, empathizing, probing, questioning, interpreting, confronting, restatement, silence, catharsis, assurance, immediacy, encouraging, clarifying, self-disclosing, concretizing, homework and summarizing (Okobiah, 2011).

However, the importance of counselling in education can never be over emphasised. This is because personal, social and emotional challenges, rather than struggles related to academic performance, may lead to college students' decisions to leave school. Counselling services help students in optimum achievement and adequate adjustment in the varied life situations. Its programmes help in the total development of the students, help the students to have a better self-understanding and proper adjustment to self and society, help in development of proper motivation and clarification of goals and ideas to students in conformity with their basic potentialities and social tendencies. Okobiah (2011) opines that total development of the student necessitates that individual differences among them are expected, accepted, understood and planned for. Therefore, all types of experiences in an institution should be organized so as to contribute to the total development of the student.

The complexities and challenges of everyday living are experienced by all persons, both adults and students, in developed and developing countries (Wango, 2015). In addition, there are increasing social, economic, personal and even educational challenges in the modern society (Biswalo, 2013; Wango, 2015). University life is associated with experience of significant stressors for students that include stress experienced by new life of transiting into a university life (Atwarter, 2011). These challenges can have major effects on the student's experience that may include negative academic performance (Harding, 2011), inability to progress through the university academic years, decision to remain at university and overall psychological well-being (Bennett & Bigfoot-Sipes, 2015).

Most universities in Nigeria offer social support to students in form of counselling services, financial assistance, work-aid, health and academic services. The provision of counselling services is thought to increase the likelihood of students continuing with their courses and also addressing other life problems. Thus, counselling is a significant service for university students (Wango, 2015). In the light of the importance attached to counselling in the Universities, Nigerian Universities Commission (NUC) includes it as an essential service that must be provided to students in higher education as a condition for accreditation of an institution (Denga, 2012); hence every university offering guidance and counselling must have a counselling clinic where guidance and counselling services are being offered to students, if not the department will not pass accreditation.

In order to achieve total development in students, the following guidance and counselling services are available to students and the host community: educational services, vocational, psychological and personal social services (Okobiah, 2011). The educational service in guidance and counselling is a service which takes care of all issues associated with education as they relate to the physical environment of the school, the structural makeup of the school, activities within the school, students' intake, students' progress, and adaptability within the school (Modo & Inaja, 2013). To this end, Olayinka (2011) says that academic counselling is assisting students make the most appropriate use of their educational opportunities. Also Slaa and

Barkam (2010) define educational guidance as assistance given to students that enable them function well in the school. He continues by saying that it assists them in understanding themselves and how their potentials could be developed. With these definitions, it is obvious that educational guidance and counselling for the adolescents is sine qua non if they must achieve maximally.

Vocational service in guidance and counselling, according to Atwarter (2011), is the process of assisting the individuals to choose occupation, prepare to enter into it and make progress. Psychological Counselling deals with personal problems and life adjustment. It covers reduction of maladaptive behaviour among students, encouraging socially desirable behaviour, provision of referral services, and encouragement of healthy interaction between the home and the school. According to Slaa and Barkam (2010), psychological well-being in students decreases significantly just before the first semester at the start of university education. In personal social guidance and counselling, Bathe and Prior (2011) inferred that the service helps students to take care of their socio-personal problems relating to personality maladjustments. Yet, on university campuses, where students have the option to seek help at their campus counselling centre, it has been observed that only a small percentage of individuals who could benefit from such services, actually make use of them.

Also, Kroska and Harkness (2012) reported on utilisation of counselling services rate by local and international students in America, that only a very small percentage of between 2% and 4% of university students accessed counselling services; and in which case females are more likely to use them than males (Cornell, 2015).

However, a number of factors may lead individuals within the general population and college students to avoid or use mental health services. Bathe and Prior (2011) opine that counselling and psychotherapy are viewed by many college students as uncomfortable, upsetting, risky, and generally tough for them to engage in. These ideas may stem from a variety of internal and external factors. Students may be fearful about disclosing personal information about themselves to a stranger, or feel embarrassed if their social circle becomes aware that they are seeing a therapist (Cornell, 2015). Likewise, students may not want to discuss emotional subject matter for fear of re-experiencing deeply painful emotions (Vogel, Wester & Larson, 2012). Factors like cultural and social norms, masculine identity and gender role conflict, all do play a role in men's attitudes toward help seeking and the degree to which they are inclined to seek help (Steinfeldt, Steinfeldt, England & Speight, 2012).

For others, the anticipated risk of the perceived difficulty of the process and the stigma associated with it does not outweigh the usefulness, or benefits, associated with the services rendered (Vogel et al., 2012). However, the inadequate utilisation of counselling services may be explained by students' preference for relying on friends for emotional support. It seems that students felt a greater connection and empathy among their friends, and despite these characteristics being a mainstay of the therapeutic approach, they are not identified in counselling context by the

students. This suggests that in some students, psychological defences related to confronting mental services for assistance were already at play and were sabotaging the therapeutic endeavours of the well-meaning counsellor. These findings relating to the utilisation of counselling services by students are largely consistent with a research study by Bradley, Parr, Lan, Bing and Gould (2011). These studies have shown that in overall, some students seem to be reluctant to seek counselling services and when they do, they are generally at crisis point.

The barriers that hinder students from utilising counselling services suggest a profound difference in worldview. This may largely be due to lack of understanding and awareness on the part of students with regard to privacy safeguards and the essential value of confidentiality exercised by counsellors in the counselling setting (Vogel et al., 2012). A common anxiety voiced by many students was that the information they provided to the counsellor, would be made available to university authorities, parents, and/or friends (Jorm, 2014). Many feared this would be detrimental to their academic stay and personal lives. One way of alleviating this problem is for universities, and in particular counselling service providers, to clearly articulate their position on ethical conduct in relation to confidentiality as stipulated by their professional body. This clarification may dispel myths and misunderstandings by students that counsellors will disclose their private information.

Moreover, there is evidence to suggest that many students are very uncomfortable in discussing their personal problems with someone (a counsellor) they regarded as a stranger. While some students felt a sense of embarrassment, others believed it is not possible to effectively relate with a stranger. These findings are inconsistent with some of the research literature. Likewise, for some students, issues of shame and loss of face, in particular, deter them from utilising counselling.

However, Jorm (2014) found three barriers that hinder students from utilising counselling services; these include cultural differences in basic beliefs about mental health problems, unfamiliarity with basic concept of counselling, and unawareness of the existence of the services. Generally, students usually resolve their problems by seeking out a friend and/or other students. It has also been shown that individuals simply may not know much about counselling and psychotherapeutic services (Jorm, 2014). The students often think these services are only for people with severe mental illness, that the services are too costly, or may be unaware of the professional helping agencies available to them. Such perceptions and lack of knowledge may prevent or lead to under-utilization of beneficial counselling services by the undergraduates, especially where people strictly adhere to their cultures.

Biswalo (2013) contends that the need for counselling services today could be due to the ever-growing complexity of the society and people have to learn how to cope with the upcoming challenges. The unprecedented expansion of educational institutions creates a number of psychological problems that are personal, vocational and social which counselling will help the students to cope (Jorm, 2014). This is

because, as argued by Frank and Karyn (2011), university undergraduate students are young adults and hence in need of counselling services. On the impact of counselling on college students, there are two main concerns related to it: retention and students' well-being. Many studies have link students' use of counselling services to retention rates (Biswalo, 2013). Studies show that students receiving counselling services may have higher rates of continuation and graduation, less conflict with self and peers and maintain good study habits (Biswalo, 2013).

The attitude of some university undergraduates towards accessing counselling services has been a source of worry because of its attendant consequences. Certain decisions that have been taken by some students which have resulted to getting involved in cultism, prostitution, robbery, examination malpractices and consequent expulsion from school may be attributed to non-utilization of counselling services. It has been observed also that instead of getting help from school counsellors, some of them seem to have relied on their parents, pastors and peers' advices which, most of the times, failed towards yielding the expected ends thereby landing them into impending problems that may seem difficult to come out of. Some, out of maintaining secrecy and culture, see obtaining counselling services as a very difficult task: exposing oneself to a stranger in the person of a counsellor, while some seem to be ignorant of the counselling services available to them. The question now is which counselling services are available to the undergraduates? If there are counselling services, do they access the services? The answer to these questions is the basis for this study. This study therefore, investigated the availability and accessibility of counselling services by the undergraduates. The objective of this paper therefore, is to determine the availability and accessibility of counselling services by undergraduates.

### **Research Questions**

Two research questions guided the study.

1. What guidance and counselling services are available to university undergraduates?
2. What life issues make undergraduates seek counselling services?

### **Methodology**

The study adopted the descriptive survey design. The population of the study was 4,515 undergraduates from the Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka and Chukwuemeka Odumegwu University, which are the two government-owned universities in Anambra state. The sample size was 450 undergraduates drawn through accidental sampling techniques. The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire developed by the researchers based on the information obtained from literature reviewed. It is structured in a 4 point likert scale of strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree. The questionnaire is titled "Questionnaire on Availability and Accessibility of Counselling Services by University Undergraduates." The instrument was validated by three experts: two in Guidance and counselling and one in Test and Measurement from Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Split-half method of estimation and Spearman Rank Difference Correlation

Coefficient formula were used to establish the reliability of the instrument. The reliability coefficient values of the instrument were 0.76 and 0.74 for items in B1 and B2 respectively. The questionnaire consisted of two sections: A and B. Section A was an introductory part that solicited for the bio-data of the respondents while section B has two clusters with reference to the research questions and each contained 6 items making it 12 items in all. The researchers adopted a direct approach in the administration of the questionnaire on the respondents to ensure 100% return rate. The data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation, with 2.50 as the criterion value. Any item whose mean is below 2.50 is rejected while those whose mean scores are from 2.50 and above indicated acceptance.

### **Presentation of results**

**Research Question 1:** What are the guidance and counselling services available to the university undergraduates in Anambra state?

The data obtained in respect of the Research Question 1 are analysed in table 1 and result presented accordingly.

**Table 1:** The guidance and counselling services available to undergraduates

S/N	Description	Mean	Remark
1.	Individual and group counselling services	3.21	Agreed
2.	Vocational/career information services	3.02	Agreed
3.	Psychological and wellness services	3.03	Agreed
4.	Decision making and leadership skills	3.03	Agreed
5.	Educational services	3.10	Agreed
6.	Social and inter-relationship skills	3.00	Agreed

In table 1, all the respondents agreed that there is availability of counselling services for undergraduates. Under this Table 1, all the items scored above 2.50. This indicated that guidance and counselling services are available for the university undergraduates. The result indicates that the following counselling services are being provided for them: individual and group counselling services, vocational/career information services, psychological and wellness services, provision of decision making and leadership skills, educational services and social and inter-relationship

skills. The items have mean scores of 3.21, 3.02, 3.03, 3.03, 3.10 and 3.00 respectively.

**Research Question 2:** What life issues make undergraduates seek counselling services?

The data obtained in respect of the Research Question 2 are analyzed in table 2 and result presented accordingly.

**Table 2:** The issues that lead undergraduates towards seeking counselling services

S/N	Description	Mean	Remark
1.	for anger management	2.96	Agree
2.	for personal concerns	3.01	Agree
3.	on referral to a counsellor	2.92	Agree
4.	When distressed	2.87	Agree
5.	For learning difficulties	2.97	Agree
6.	In conflict with self and peers	2.70	Agree

The analysis of data presented on table 2 indicated that the university undergraduates are accessing counselling services in school. This is because the mean scores of all the items in the table are above 2.50. Specifically, the students access counselling service for the following reasons: anger management, personal concerns, on referral to a counsellor, when distressed, for learning difficulties and whenever in conflict with peers. Each of the items gets the mean score of 2.96, 3.01, 2.92, 2.87, 2.97 and 2.70 respectively.

### **Discussion of the findings**

The findings of this study are discussed based on the research questions. On the counselling services available to the undergraduates, the study revealed the following services as being available for the undergraduates to utilize: individual and group counselling services, vocational/career information services, psychological and wellness services, provision of decision making and leadership skills, provision of educational services and social and inter-relationship skills. These findings gave support to the contributions of Denga (2012) who sees the counsellor as manager of a project called client and that the counsellor manages the client's educational, vocational and personal-social potentials in a way that the individual becomes useful to himself and the society at large. It therefore implies that these services are being provided by the counsellors within the university centres to those clients that are in need of any of them.

For the research question two, on the issues that lead undergraduates towards seeking counselling services in the campuses, anger management, personal concerns, on referral, when distressed, for learning difficulties and during conflict with self and peers, were identified. This finding gave support to the findings of Biswalo (2013) who concluded that the students who utilize counselling services are likely to have higher rates of continuation and graduation in school, less conflict with self and peers and maintain good study habits with which to excel in academics.

### **Conclusion**

This study investigated the availability and accessibility of counselling services by undergraduates. It has shown that counselling services are available for the undergraduates to be accessing in their various universities.

### **Recommendations**

The researchers recommended that more awareness should be created to let the students know that counselling services in the campus are for everybody and for their progress both in school and outside of school. They should be made to understand that on no account should a counsellor relay what has been discussed in counselling to another person without the permission of the client. This will make the students feel free with their counsellors and in turn be able to confide in them.

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