COUNSELLORS' CHARACTERISTICS AND SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN UYO LOCAL EDUCATION COMMITTEE

GERTRUDE JEREMIAH UDOH (PhD)
Department of Guidance and Counselling, Faculty of Education
University of Uyo
gertrudejudoh@uniuyo.edu.ng, gertrudeaarchibong@uniuyo.edu.ng (+2348064314033)

&
ONOFIOK, B. W (PhD)
Department of General Studies, Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic,
Ikot Osurua, Ikot Ekpene
Blessingwilson20@gmail.com (+2347089808245)

Abstract
This study investigated counsellors' interpersonal characteristics and social adjustment of secondary school students in Uyo Local Education Committee. Two research questions were raised to guide the study. A correlational research design was adopted while the population of the study comprised of all the 6,618 senior secondary Two (SS2) students in the fifteen (15) public secondary schools in the study area. A sample size of 378 Senior Secondary Two (SS2) students which represents 5 percent of the study population was selected for the study using Taro Yamane sampling formulae. To get adequate sampled schools, random sampling method was used to select 9 public secondary schools out of 15. Thereafter, hence, 42 students were selected from each of the sampled schools using hat and draw method of random sampling, which gives a total of 378 sampled respondents. The researcher's structured questionnaire entitled "Counsellors' Interpersonal Characteristics and Students Social Adjustment Questionnaire (CICSSAQ)" was used for data collection. Data generated from the field was analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) statistics and the study findings revealed a very high positive and significant relationship between counsellors' rapport-building, confidentiality, and social adjustment of secondary school students in Uyo Local Education Committee. Conclusion was drawn from the findings while the researcher recommended among other things that, as a way of building rapport, school counsellors should always be friendly, approachable and offer timely support to students so that they can develop positive thoughts and beliefs about themselves as well as behave healthily with schoolmates.

Keywords: Interpersonal, Characteristics, Social, Adjustment

Introduction/Literature Review

The psychological well-being of secondary school students is a major concern worldwide, and social adjustment is a key aspect of their well-being. Social adjustment refers to the ability of individuals to cope with social situations, maintain relationships, and function effectively in their social environment. However, many secondary school students face difficulties in social adjustment, which can lead to negative outcomes such as low academic performance, behavioral problems, and emotional distress.

Counseling is a common intervention used to address the social and emotional needs of secondary school students. Counselors play a critical role in helping students develop the skills and strategies needed to adjust socially, cope with stress, and improve their overall well-being. School counselors play a vital role in the social and emotional adjustment of students in secondary schools. Dawood (2019) stated that the effectiveness of counseling is largely dependent on the interpersonal characteristics of the counselors. Examples of such interpersonal characteristics of counselors include but are not limited to rapport building, and confidentiality.

Rapport-building refers to the ability to establish a connection or relationship with students (Karami and Eslami, 2017). Counselors who are skilled in building rapport can create a positive and supportive environment for students. A positive environment is essential for student's social and emotional well-being and adjustment. Karami and Eslami (2017) noted that students who have positive relationships with their counselors are more likely to have better academic and social outcomes. Therefore, counselors who are skilled in building rapport are likely to have a positive impact on the social adjustment of students in secondary schools.

Confidentiality refers to the ability to keep students' personal information private and confidential (Sperber and Stein 2017). Counselors who are good at maintaining confidentiality can create a safe and trusting environment for students. A safe and trusting environment is essential for student's social and emotional well-being and adjustment. Martin, Nejad, Colmar and Liem (2018) maintained that students who feel safe and supported are more likely to develop a positive self-concept and social competence. Counselors who are good at maintaining confidentiality are likely to have a positive impact on the social adjustment of students in secondary schools. Therefore, counselors need to possess these interpersonal characteristics to effectively support the social and emotional adjustment of students in secondary schools. The present study sought to investigate the relationship between counsellors' interpersonal characteristics and social adjustment of secondary school students in Uyo Local Education Committee.

Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1986)

Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, developed by renowned psychologist Albert Bandura, is a prominent psychological framework that emphasizes the reciprocal interaction between an individual's cognitive processes, behavior, and the environment. This theory provides valuable insights into how people learn, develop, and engage in social interactions. Central to Bandura's theory is the notion of observational learning or modeling, whereby individuals acquire knowledge, behaviors, and attitudes by observing and imitating others. According to Bandura, individuals learn through four interrelated processes: attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation. Through attention, learners actively focus on and pay attention to the modeled behavior. Retention involves storing and encoding the observed behavior in memory. Reproduction refers to the ability to reproduce the behavior that has been observed. Finally, motivation influences the likelihood of individuals imitating and replicating the observed behavior. Bandura's Social Cognitive theory offers valuable insights into the processes by which individuals learn and develop behaviors, attitudes, and social skills.

This theory is relevant to this work in that it explained the significance of the counselor's interpersonal characteristics on students' social adjustment. It is observed from this theory that positive interpersonal characteristics of school counsellors' can foster students' social adjustment and promote their overall well-being. Counselors who incorporate sense of humors, tolerance, rapport-building, and confidentiality in counselling practice can create an atmosphere where students feel safe, supported, and empowered to navigate the challenges of adolescence and develop positive social skills that will benefit them throughout their lives.

Concept of Social Adjustment

According to Ross and Ross (2019), social adjustment refers to the degree to which an individual can effectively interact and adapt to the demands and expectations of their social environment. Feldman and Matjasko (2015) defined social adjustment as the process through which individuals acquire the necessary skills, attitudes, and behaviors to function effectively in social settings. In their study, Chen, and Harris (2018) defined social adjustment as the capacity to interact effectively with others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and navigate various social situations. Vorrath and Brendtro (2022), social adjustment are the process by which individuals acquire the skills, attitudes, and behavior patterns necessary to participate in and contribute to the social and cultural life of a group or society. Social adjustment can be defined as the degree to which an individual feels competent, accepted, and satisfied in social relationships and social roles.

Social adjustment refers to the process of adapting to the role of being a student and navigating various aspects of the school environment. It involves developing the necessary skills and behaviors to

interact effectively with others, resist negative peer pressure, and successfully cope with the challenges of school life (Baker, Dilly, Aupperlee, and Patil, 2019). Successful social adjustment is essential for overall well-being and academic success in secondary school students. Social adjustment encompasses the ability to effectively interact with peers, establish and maintain positive relationships, and navigate social situations. It involves both social and emotional aspects, including self-esteem, self-confidence, and the ability to cope with social challenges.

Rapport Building and Social Adjustment of Students

Rapport building is a critical aspect of the counseling process, as it sets the foundation for a trusting and collaborative relationship between counselors and students. Counselors who excel in building rapport establish a safe and supportive space where students feel comfortable expressing themselves. The establishment of positive rapport between counselors and students is crucial for effective communication and engagement in counseling. When students perceive their counselors as empathetic, trustworthy, and understanding, they are more likely to be open about their thoughts, feelings, and concerns (Erford, 2018). This open and honest communication is essential for addressing social adjustment issues and exploring effective strategies for improvement.

In highlighting the importance of rapport building in promoting positive counseling outcomes, Norcross, and Lambert (2018) found that a strong therapeutic alliance, built through rapport, is associated with increased client satisfaction, better treatment outcomes, and improved social adjustment. Students who experience a positive rapport with their counselors are more likely to actively participate in counseling sessions, follow recommendations, and engage in self-reflection. Rapport building also creates a supportive environment that validates students' experiences and emotions.

Positive rapport building is also closely linked to the concept of the therapeutic alliance, which emphasizes the collaborative nature of the counseling relationship. When students perceive their counselors as collaborative partners in their journey towards social adjustment, they are more likely to actively engage in the counseling process and take ownership of their growth. This shared responsibility and collaboration can lead to greater self-efficacy, resilience, and improved social adjustment outcomes.

Confidentiality and Social Adjustment of Students

Confidentiality is a fundamental aspect of counseling that plays a crucial role in promoting the social adjustment of students. Maintaining confidentiality refers to the ethical obligation of counselors to keep the personal information shared by students during counseling sessions private and secure (Kocayörük and Abacı, 2019). Students require assurance that their personal information will be treated with utmost confidentiality to feel safe and trust their counselors. Confidentiality creates a safe and supportive environment where students can freely express their thoughts, feelings, and concerns without fear of judgment, stigma, or repercussions (Gonzalez and Williams, 2018). This trust forms the foundation for effective counseling relationships and facilitates social adjustment. When students feel confident that their personal information will be kept confidential, they are more likely to disclose sensitive and private information that may be critical to addressing social adjustment issues. This openness allows counselors to gain a comprehensive understanding of students' experiences, challenges, and strengths, leading to more targeted and effective interventions.

Confidentiality also encourages students to seek help and actively engage in social adjustment interventions. Students may be hesitant to seek counseling support if they have concerns about their privacy being compromised. However, when they are assured of strict confidentiality, they are more likely to overcome their reservations and seek the assistance they need (Erford, 2015). By maintaining confidentiality, counselors create a supportive environment that encourages students to participate actively in the counseling process and work towards their social adjustment goals.

A breach of confidentiality can have detrimental effects on the counseling relationship and the social adjustment of students. If students perceive that their personal information has been shared without their consent, it can lead to a breakdown of trust and hinder their willingness to seek further help (Sivis-Cetinkaya, 2019). Students may become more guarded and reluctant to disclose important information, which can impede progress in addressing social adjustment challenges.

Statement of the Problem
        In recent years, it has become common to read, hear or witness incidences of students' involvement in anti-social behaviours such as indiscipline in school, child abuse, alcohol intake, drug abuse, rape, prostitution, sexual perversion, stealing, cultism, adolescent suicide, school dropout and all kinds of wanton misdemeanours. It is sad to say that some of these social problems are unfortunately fallouts of the social ills in the society. Generally, it has been observed that some students find it difficult to get along with their fellow students and teachers due to poor social adjustment. Many have agreed that poor social adjustment of students could be reduced if school counsellors are exemplary in the display of good interpersonal characteristics which students can emulate. Therefore, this study sought to investigate counsellors' interpersonal characteristics and social adjustment of secondary school students in Uyo Local Education Committee.

Research Questions
        The following research questions were raised for the study:
1. What is the relationship between rapport building and social adjustment of secondary school students Uyo Local Education Committee?
2. What is the relationship between confidentiality and social adjustment of secondary school students Uyo Local Education Committee?

Research Method
Design of the Study
        The correlational survey design was adopted for the study. This design is used whenever a researcher wants to find out the magnitude and direction of relationship that exists between the dependent and independent variables (Udoh and Joseph, 2005). Therefore, this design was considered suitable for this study because it enabled the researcher to measure the relationship between counsellors' interpersonal characteristics and social adjustment of students in Uyo Local Education Committee.

Population of the Study
        The population of this study consisted of all the 6,618 senior secondary Two (SS2) students in the fifteen (15) public secondary schools in Uyo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State (Secondary Education Board, Research and Statistic Division 2023).

Sample and Sampling Technique
        A sample size of 378 Senior Secondary Two (SS2) students which represents 5 percent of the study population was selected for the study using Taro Yamane sampling formulae. To get adequate sampled schools, random sampling method was used to select 9 public secondary schools out of 15. Thereafter, hence, 42 students were selected from each of the sampled schools using hat and draw method of random sampling, which gives a total of 378 sampled respondents.

Instrumentation
        A self-structured questionnaire titled "Counsellors' Interpersonal Characteristics and Students Social Adjustment Questionnaire (CICSSAQ)" was used for data collection. The items were framed in line with the research questions and hypotheses. The instrument had two parts. Section (A) contained 20 items, that is, 5 items each on counsellors' interpersonal characteristics while section (B) contained 8 items measuring students' social adjustment . CICSSAQ was measured in a four-point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA) = 4; Agree (A) = 3; Disagree (D) = 2; Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1. The respondents were requested to give their own opinions or views to the instrument using the symbol (√).

Validation of the Instrument
        To ensure the face validity of the instrument, three copies of the questionnaire instrument were given to experts in instrument validation. Two of the experts were from the Department of Psychological

Foundations of Education (Measurement and Evaluation Unit) while the remaining one was from Guidance and Counselling, all in the University of Uyo to assess the suitability or otherwise of the items in the instrument. The inputs and corrections made by the evaluators and that of the researchers' supervisor were used to form the final copy for administration.

Reliability of the Instrument

To establish the reliability of the instrument, Cronbach Alpha reliabity technique was used. Here, the instrument was administered 40 SS2 students in a selected school not included in the population sample. The instrument was administered, and data were collated. Data was subjected to correlation and Cronbach Alpha statistics was applied for test of internal consistency of the instrument. This yielded the overall reliability co-efficient of .72 for counsellors' interpersonal characteristics and .86 for items measuring students social adjustement respectively. This index according to Udoh and Joseph (2005) is a high reliability index since the reliability co-efficient is above .50. Therefore, the instrument was deemed reliable for use in the study.

Method of Data Collection

The research instruments were personally administered on the respondents in their respective schools by the researcher together with two trained research assistants. Also, permission from the respective principals were sought to allow the respondents respond to the items in the instrument. In addition to items written on the questionnaire, the subjects were given verbal instructions and clarifications where necessary. Copies of the questionnaire were retrieved after completion without subjecting the respondents to time constraint. All the 378 copies of questionnaires administered were filled properly according to instructions and collected instantly.

Method of Data Analysis

Data generated from the field was analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) statistics. The research questions were answered using the decision rule for answering questions in a correlational study, as presented by Uzoagulu's (2011) as follows:-

Coefficient (r)	-	Relationship
± .00 to ± .20	-	Negligible, weak, very low, little or none
± .21 to ± .40	-	Present, slight, but low
± .41 to ± .60	-	Average, moderately high, high
± .61 to ± .1.00	-	Very high

Results and Discussion of Findings
Research Question 1

What is the relationship between rapport-building and social adjustment of secondary school students in Uyo Local Education Committee?

Table 1: Correlation of analysis of relationship between rapport-building and social adjustment of secondary school students

Variables	$\sum x$ $\sum y$	$\sum x^2$ $\sum y^2$	$\sum xy$	r-cal
Rapport-Building (x)	3644	66818	715130	0.75
Social Adjustment of Students (y)	8304	34602		

n = 378

Result in Table 3 shows a correlation value of 0.75. From the decision rule, it is noticed that a high positive relationship exists between rapport-building and social adjustment of secondary school students in

Uyo Local Education Committee. The implication of this result is that students are most likely to adjust socially in school if the school counsellors establish positive rapport or relationship by show of warmly appreciation and concern for student's needs.

Research Question 2

What is the relationship between confidentiality and social adjustment of secondary school students in Uyo Local Education Committee?

Table 2: Correlation of analysis of relationship between confidentiality and social adjustment of secondary school students

	n = 378			
Variables	$\sum x$ $\sum y$	$\sum x^2$ $\sum y^2$	$\sum xy$	r-cal
Confidentiality (x)	3821	65183	818895	0.84
Social Adjustment of Students (y)	8304	34602		

Result in Table 4 show a very high positive relationship between confidentiality and social adjustment of secondary school students in Uyo Local Education Committee. This is evidence on the correlation coefficient of 0.84. This result implies that patients are more prone to be well adjusted to school life if high level of confidentiality and trust is maintained by school counsellors.

Discussion of Findings

Result from research question one revealed a very high positive relationship between rapport-building and social adjustment of secondary school students in Uyo Local Education Committee. This finding is in tandem with the finding of study conducted by Norcross and Lambert (2018), which showed that a strong therapeutic alliance built through rapport, is associated with increased client satisfaction, better treatment outcomes and improved social adjustment. Students who experience a positive rapport with their counselors are more likely to actively participate in counseling sessions, follow recommendations, and associate peacefully with fellow students. Rapport building also creates a supportive environment that validates students' experiences and emotions.

Result from research question two revealed a very high positive relationship between confidentiality and social adjustment of secondary school students in Uyo Local Education Committee. This finding is in tandem with the finding of study conducted by Ndambuki (2013), which revealed that students are most likely to be well adjusted to school due to high level of confidentiality maintained by school counsellors. This finding also agrees with earlier finding of Adeleke, Adekanye, Adefemi, Okuku, Elegbe and Tume (2011), which revealed that the students would likely be willing to maintain confidentiality in their interaction with fellow students if the school counsellors are exemplary in keeping students' discussions or information confidential. Hence, it is observed from this finding that maintaining confidentiality in counselling practice can impact positively on students' social adjustment.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it is therefore concluded that good interpersonal characteristics of school counsellors are very essential in enhancing students' social adjustment. It is obvious that the students are more prone to be well adjusted to school life if the counsellors' display positive interpersonal attributes which enhances the physical, social, and mental wellbeing of students.

Recommendation

Based on the finding of the study, it is therefore recommended that:

1. School counsellors should maintain friendly interaction and kind gestures when communicating with the students.
2. School counsellors should always respect the feelings and opinion of the students by understanding their perspective and showing serious concern about their welfare.
3. As a way of building rapport, school counsellors should always be friendly, approachable   and offer timely support to students so that they can develop positive thoughts and beliefs about themselves as well as behave healthily with schoolmates.
4. School counsellors should always act in accordance with the ethical and legal responsibilities of maintaining confidentiality and privacy of clients in the school.

REFERENCES

Adeleke, T., Adekanye, O., Adefemi, S., Okuku, A., Elegbe, T. and Tume, A. (2011).   Knowledge, attitudes, and practice of confidentiality of practices' health records among health   care professionals at Federal Medical Centre, Bida. *Nigeria Journal   of Medicine,* 20 (2): 228-235.

Baker, J., Dilly, L., Aupperlee, J. and Patil, A. (2019). The developmental context of school satisfaction: Schools as psychologically healthy environments. *Journal of School Psychology*, 73, 58-81.

Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and actions: A social cognitive theory.* Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall

Chen, X. and Harris, P. (2018). *Children's social functioning: How has it been studied and what do we know?* New York: Springer

Dawood, A. (2019). Effectiveness of school counseling on students' social adjustment. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Research*, 9(1): 63-74.

Erford, B. (2018). *Professional school counseling: A handbook of theories, programs, and practices*. New York: Routledge.

Feldman, A. and Matjasko, J. (2015). The role of school-based extracurricular activities in adolescent development: A comprehensive review and future directions. *Review of Educational Research*, 75(2): 159-210.

Gonzalez, A. and Williams, M. (2018). Confidentiality in school counseling: Ethical considerations and best practices. *Professional School Counseling,* 21(1): 1-9.

Karami, A. and Eslami, R. (2017). The role of humor in counseling: A systematic review. International *Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, 11(4): 133-143.

Kocayörük, E. and Abacı, R. (2019). School counselors' roles in maintaining students' confidentiality: A systematic literature review. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling*, 41(3): 297-311.

Martin, A., Nejad, H., Colmar, S. and Liem, G. (2018). Academic buoyancy and psychological risk: Exploring reciprocal relationships. *Journal of School Psychology,* 66, 38-52.

Ndambuki,   A.   (2013).   Confidentiality   and   privacy. http//.www.drexel.edu.overview.confidentialityprivacy.com. (Retrieved 7 July, 2023).

Norcross, J. C. and Lambert, M. J. (2018). Psychotherapy relationships that work III. *Psychotherapy*, 55(4): 303-315.

Ross, D., and Ross, S. (2019). Social adjustment and school success: A role for school psychologists. *School Psychology Review*, 28(1): 23-41.

Sivis-Cetinkaya, A. (2019). Breaching confidentiality to report students risk-taking behaviour. Journal of Psychologists and Counsellors in Schools, 30 (2): 216-226.

Sperber, S. and Stein, R. (2017). Confidentiality in counseling: Perceptions and experiences of school counselors. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 95(4): 381-390.

State Secondary Education Board (SSEB, 2023). List of schools as per local education committee. Akwa Ibom State Secretariat: Uyo.

Udoh, A. and Joseph, E. (2005). *Foundations of Educational Research*. Joe Graph   Publications,   4Ikot Ekpene, 35-40p.

Uzoagulu, A. (2011). *Practical guide to writing research project reports in tertiary institutions.* Enugu: Cheaston Limited.

Vorrath, H. and Brendtro, L. (2022). Social adjustment: How to manage the next stage of life. In: J. Adelson (Ed.), *Handbook of Adolescent Psychology.* New York: John Wiley & Sons.