



Examining the Skills Acquired by School Counsellors During Training and its Influence on Their Practice in Selected Secondary Schools of the Mezam and Mfoundi Divisions of the North West and Center Regions of Cameroon

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Abstract: This study was carried out to examine the skills acquired by school counsellors during training and its influence on their practice in selected secondary schools of the Mezam and Mfoundi Divisions of the North West and Center Regions of Cameroon. The concurrent nested mixed-method research design was used in conducting this study. To collect quantitative data, the descriptive survey design with the aid of a questionnaire made up of closed-ended items was used. Qualitative data was collected through the phenomenological approach with the aid of an interview guide made up of open-ended questions. The sample was made up of 249 randomly selected school counsellors of the Mezam and Mfoundi Divisions. In data processing, a predesigned EpiData Version 3.1 database which has in-built consistency and validation checks was used to enter the data. Further consistency, data range and validation checks were also performed in SPSS version 25 to identify invalid codes. Quantitative data was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistical tools; frequency counts, graphs, percentages and the Pearson test were used to test hypotheses. Thematic analysis with the aid of themes and quotations was used for qualitative data. The findings indicated that: There was a significant, positive and strong impact between skills acquired during training and practice ($R\text{-value}=0.621^{**}$, $P\text{-value}=0.000<0.05$). The implications of these findings are that the quality of training being offered to student counsellors in training institutions in Cameroon be improved. It was therefore recommended that: School counsellors should be trained to be multiskilled and provided with a variety of services for an ever-expanding client population. The job of a school counsellor in contemporary times has been very demanding and as such, training needs to be of high standard to empower the counsellors to effectively address the various situations on the field. Conclusively, the skills acquired by school counsellors during training influence their practice.

Keywords: Skills Acquired, School Counsellors, Training, Practice, Secondary Schools, Mezam and Mfoundi Divisions

INTRODUCTION

School counsellors have an enormous impact on student achievement and attainment (Education Trust, 2007). From the courses students take to the goals they set and paths they pursue, school counsellors are powerful forces in their schools and in the lives of students (Education Trust, 2007). The importance of providing school counselling within school has gained more attention recently (Tolan and Dodge, 2005). Tolan and Dodge (2005) opines that school counsellor education programs are designed to provide students with the knowledge and skills to become competent professional

school counsellors. In this light there is a need for school counsellor training programmes which will equip school counsellors and school counselling students with the skills and competencies needed to practice effectively (McEachern, 2003). In the school counselling profession, competence includes the ability to provide a variety of counselling-related tasks and activities including one on one counselling, group counselling and academic support often through the facilitation of counselling services (ASCA, 2005).

According to Kozlowski and Huss (2013), school counsellors have unique, specialized training needs that differ from those of clinical mental health counsellors. They are licensed by state educational agencies. They must be ready to function in a variety of roles to support all students' academic, career, and personal/social development (Studer and Oberman, 2006). In addition, they work in complex educational systems, have large case loads, and manage school counselling programs. Their jobs encompass much more than individual and group counselling and the traditional training models are not keeping up with the needs of today's school counsellors (Studer and Oberman, 2006). School counsellors need clarification of their unique role on a school campus while learning how to manage an overwhelming number of referrals and student needs, how to manage the influences of teachers, how to maintain their own skills apart from teachers, how to implement counselling programs as well as how to integrate themselves and the counselling program into the school system (ASCA, 2010; Kozlowski and Huss, 2013). In fact the American School Counsellor Association (ASCA, 2010) states that school counsellors should possess proficient skills in program development, program leadership, collaborative practices, as well as appropriate referral procedures (ASCA, 2010).

In order to ensure that school counsellors are well-trained to meet the needs of students, various organizations have established standards and guidelines such as; the American School Counsellors' Association (ASCA), the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) and the Council for the Accreditation of Counselling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP).

According to Walley (2009), school counsellor education programs are expected to offer preparation in certain areas of knowledge and skills that encompass a range of issues faced by students today. To him the primary means through which school counsellors obtain (at least minimum) professional knowledge and skills is through completion of a school counsellor preparation program. The ASCA School Counsellor Competencies outline the knowledge, abilities, skills and attitudes that ensure school counsellors are equipped to meet the rigorous demands of the profession and the needs of students (ASCA, 2012). Brott (2006) opines that it is of critical importance that counsellors know what is needed from them and their professional abilities. According to Uttenthal and Brown (2006) perceptions play a large role when counsellors consider the best way to utilize their skills in practice. They opine that significant numbers of school counsellors believed that, as a result of their training course, they had a more positive attitude at work, and enjoyed better relationships at work.

Lee (2005) observed that present day school counsellors have post training needs due to the fact that schools are often forced to confront a number of significant issues that affect the psychosocial, emotional, and intellectual development of their students. Therefore, school counsellor training must adequately prepare future practitioners to meet the unique needs of today's school children (Lee, 2005).

SavitzRomer (2012) states that in the face of these increasing inequities in schools, professional development (PD) for school counsellors is important. PD for high school counsellors is mandatory to meet the 5-year renewal requirement as a certified counsellor (ASCA, 2016). According to the ASCA (2016), counsellors are mandated to complete 200 hours of PD every 5 years from either of the following entities: workshops, staff development, institutes, seminars, or conferences. Despite these provisions it seems school counsellors still perform their duties with some difficulties (SavitzRomer, 2012). This study seeks to examine the skills acquired by school counsellors during training and its influence on their practice.

BACKGROUND

According to Ogbodo (2020), the genesis of guidance and counselling can be traced back to the origin of man in society. Ogbodo (2020) further opines that long ago, man has always sought guidance from persons he/she feels is in a position to help. Through traditional (informational) ways, the contribution of religious leaders, elders, priests, Imams, friends and well-wishers towards meeting the guidance needs of people in their societies have been highly eventful and impactful. She however states that, modern guidance and counselling began in the United States of America (USA) under Frank Parsons in 1908, and since then it has spread to various Countries and Continents. Guidance and counselling have grown worldwide acquiring a steady reputation as it meets the educational, vocational and personal/social needs of various recipient countries (Ogbodo, 2020). In addition, Ogbodo (2020) states that factors such as; expansion of professionalization and specialization, the Philanthropic and Humanitarianism Movement, religion, the need for mental hygiene, increased student number in American schools and social change have helped in the growth of the counselling profession.

Furthermore, Ogbodo (2020) opines that the modern concept of guidance and counselling started years back with an emphasis on human development through education. This was reflected in the works of early Greek Philosophers like Plato (427-337) the first great counsellor of the early civilization who was recognized as the first to organize psychological insights into a systematic theory and his student Aristotle 480-BC who made many significant contributions to the field of psychology. One of which is the study of people interacting with their environment (Denga et al., 2009) cited in Ogbodo (2020). After these persons many others have engaged in guidance and counselling roles and activities especially in its comprehensive form. With the rise of industrialization and modernization, the traditional guidance could no longer cope with much of the complexities in the societies, hence the birth of guidance and counselling to overcome obstacles to their personal growth (Ogbodo, 2020).

In relation to the history of the training and practice of counselling in schools, school counselling began as vocational guidance in the early 1900s (Gysbers, 2010). It was established in schools as a position occupied by administrators and teachers. No organizational structure was provided other than a list of duties. In the 1920s school counselling began to change, shaped by the mental hygiene, psychometric and child study movements. As a result, a more clinically oriented approach to school counselling emerged. This signaled a shift away from economic issues to psychological issues with an emphasis on counselling for personal adjustment (Gysbers, 2010).

Gysbers (2010) further postulates that, during the 1930s, discussions took place concerning the various personnel responsible for school counselling, the duties they performed, and their selection and training. According to him, a major mile-stone occurred with the creation of a new organizational structure called pupil personnel services. Within that structure, the concept of guidance services emerged (Gysbers, 2010). The field of school counselling had moved from a position with a list of duties to a position with a list of duties organized by guidance services all under the overall structure of pupil personnel services (Gysbers, 2010).

Furthermore, Gysbers (2010) states that the 1940s and 1950s saw the expansion and extension of counselling in the schools. The literature during years 1941–1945 focused on contributions to the war effort. After 1945, attention returned to the need for counselling in the schools and on ways to improve the services provided (Gysbers, 2010). The selection and training of school counsellors also received attention and support with the passage of the Vocational Education Act of 1946 and the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) of 1958. In addition, the American School Counsellor Association was established in 1952 (Gysbers, 2010).

Moreover, Gysbers (2010) opines that a major issue being debated in the 1960s and 1970s concerned the nature of school counselling. He states that it was pondered if it was more psychological in nature featuring counselling as a major intervention or was it more educational in nature featuring a broader array of interventions including counselling but also information, assessment, placement and follow-up activities? Gysbers (2010) opines that although school counselling at the elementary level

had been discussed previously, it wasn't until the 1960s that it became a reality. According to him, the NDEA, amended in the 1960s, stimulated training practices and procedures that set elementary school counselling apart from secondary school counselling. The 1960s and 1970s also witnessed increasing concern about the services model of school counselling (Gysbers, 2010). Calls for change came from a variety of sources ending up in the development of a comprehensive program approach to school counselling. Gysbers (2010) states that the concept of a program for school counselling began to take form in the 1960s and 1970s and then became a major way to organize and manage school counselling in the schools in the 1980s, 1990s and into the 21st century. To him, during this time many states developed state models. Training programs to help personnel in school districts to plan, design and implement comprehensive school counselling programs also were initiated (Gysbers, 2010).

Gysber (2010) is of the opinion that the role and functions of school counsellors was of concern during the 1980s and 1990s. According to him, some writers advocated the role of human development specialist; others recommended the role of change agent. Predominating roles were coordinating, counselling and consulting. Tied to the role and function issue was the issue of terminology. Is it guidance, guidance and counselling or school counselling? (Gysbers, 2010).

Although progress was made in developing, implementing and evaluating comprehensive school counselling programs in the first decade of the 21st century, discussion continued about program purposes and the work of school counsellors (Gysbers, 2010). Should the focus be educational (academic), vocational (career) or social/emotional (mental health)? Some writers focused on academic achievement and career but not social/ emotional or mental health. Other writers urged the opposite with mental health issues needing more attention. Still other writers urged the adoption of a holistic approach emphasizing attention to all three areas (Gysbers, 2010). Gysbers (2010) further opines that during this same decade discussion about program purposes and school counsellors' roles continued with some writers emphasizing an advocacy change agent focus. Others talked about the need to emphasize collaboration. Still others recommended school counsellors do more indirect work and less direct work with students. Finally there was a movement for school counsellors to become more data-oriented, using data to identify school concerns and student needs (Gysbers, 2010).

Furthermore, Gysbers (2010) states that the development and implementation of school counselling programs across the country grew in the first decade of the 21st century. To him, this growth was stimulated by the publication of the ASCA National Model in 2003 and its adoption by many states and school districts. A second edition was published in 2005, followed by a third edition in 2013 and the fourth edition in 2019 (Gysbers, 2010).

In addition Gysbers (2010) states that as the second decade of the 21st century began, an ongoing issue for school counselling was accountability. According to him, although this has been part of professional discussion since the 1920s, and much work was done over the ensuing years, there is a renewed sense of urgency today concerning accountability. The literature makes it clear that evaluation is here to stay and needs to be designed and carried out to not only demonstrating effectiveness but also to improve the work of school counsellors (Gysbers, 2010).

What will the next 100 years be like? No one knows for sure, but if the next 100 years are like the first 100 years, school counselling will continue to evolve. The forces that shaped school counselling so far will continue to do so, and discussion about purposes and organization will continue. So, while no one knows what the future holds, current literature suggests that at least for the near future students and their parents in school districts across the country will continue to benefit from having fully implemented school counselling programs. Embrace the past, welcome the future (Gysbers, 2010).

The Training of School Counsellors

Gibson and Mitchell (2008) define counsellor training as a license or certificate offered to an individual to perform a unique and needed service to fellow human beings after undertaking courses in counselling. According to them, professional school counsellors must be fully trained and qualified to meet the needs of the client population they are designated to serve. Gibson and Mitchell

(2008) further state that school counsellors are certified/licensed educators with a minimum of a master's degree in school counselling, making them uniquely qualified to address all students' academic, career and social/emotional development needs by designing, implementing, evaluating and enhancing a comprehensive school counselling program that promotes and enhances student success.

In addition, Gibson and Mitchell (2008) opine that school counsellors are employed in elementary, middle/junior high, high schools and universities; in district supervisory positions; and counsellor education positions. They recommend that school divisions should ensure that persons fulfilling the role of counsellor are adequately trained and should have completed a programme in counselling, including supervised practice in guidance and counselling. Once trained, the counsellors should then employ their knowledge, skills and understanding to draw up a procedure that is ample enough to include and cater for the various needs of individual pupils/students within the school framework (Gibson and Mitchell, 2008).

Brott (2006) opines that the training of school counsellors should emphasize both program development and outcomes. In addition Brott (2006) is of the opinion that it is imperative for counsellor educators to structure the professional identity development of counsellors in training through guided learning experiences. School counsellors in training should become familiar with methods to implement comprehensive school counselling programs (Murphy and Kaffenberg, 2007) cited in Kozlowski and Huss (2013). Two ways trainees traditionally become familiar with implementing counselling programs are in practicum and internship experiences. What is problematic about practicum and internship experiences for school counsellor trainees is that counsellor educators typically attribute more importance to concepts that fit within traditional training models, such as individual and group counselling, than they do to concepts outside the traditional counsellor training framework (Colbert et al., 2006) cited in Kozlowski (2013).

Gartner (1976) cited in Gertner (2007) asserts that the training and education of practitioners is the predominant factor influencing the nature of the service provided. He noted that the central issue in professional education and training is how to make that preparation most effective. In turn, Gartner (1976) cited in Gertner (2007) asserts that the primary factors influencing professional preparation effectiveness include: curricular content, faculty expertise and pedagogical skill, teaching methods employed, relationship of curriculum to both theory and practice, location of training, and how the training is related to professional practice as well as the larger societal developments. It follows that integration of Gartner's recommendations necessitates highly focused curriculum components, one based on widely endorsed training content and practices for the various skill sets to be developed by preparation program participants.

To further expatiate, McEachern (2003) opined that the mission of graduate counsellor education programs is to train students to be effective and competent counsellors. To him, school counsellor education programs are expected to offer preparation in certain areas of knowledge and skills that encompass a range of issues faced by students today. In order to ensure that school counsellors are well-trained to meet the needs of students, various organizations have established standards and guidelines. The views of these organizations regarding the training of school counsellors are discussed below:

Training of School Counsellors and the Council for the Accreditation of Counselling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP)

According to Gertner (2007), counsellor preparation in general and school counsellor preparation in particular currently is guided primarily by the (counsellor education) program accreditation standards of the Council for the Accreditation of Counselling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP). Since 1981, the CACREP (2001), a national accrediting agency, has assumed the very important charge of establishing minimum standard training curriculum and practices for school counsellors. Its incorporation as an independent body resulted from a culmination of years of work by the ACA toward defining the sets of knowledge and skills required for admission into the profession and to advocate that these requirements be adopted by the preparation programs offering counselling and

student development practice degrees (Bobby and Kandor, 1995) cited in Steward et al., (2008). Periodically contacting counsellor educators and practitioners within the school setting to receive feedback and recommendations for guideline revisions (Schmidt, 2000), the CACREP consistently provides the essential training guidelines that are most meaningful to the current needs of students.

Evidence of a commitment to maintain the critical link between training and service delivery is evident in the clearly established relationship between the eight core knowledge areas for all counsellors (that is, Professional Identity, Social and Cultural Diversity, Human Growth and Development, Career Development, Helping Relationships, Group Work, Assessment, and Research and Program Evaluation) and the school counselling program models that have been adopted by a number of schools across the nation to provide a balance between intervention responses and proactive prevention programming (Steward et al, 2008).

CACREP advocates for training model which is developmental in nature, has a guidance/career component, highlights attention to individual differences within student populations (that is, race/ethnicity, culture, and socioeconomic status) and acknowledges the importance of individual and group counselling competence, consultation, and program development and evaluation (LA Fountain and Baer, 2000) cited in Steward et al., (2008).

According to CACREP (2009) standards for school counsellors focus on eight areas: foundations, counselling, prevention and intervention, diversity and advocacy, assessment, research and evaluation, academic development, collaboration and consultation and leadership. All of which, are important when training professional school counsellors (PSCs) to work in a school environment. However, CACREP Standards expect that PSC's should: Demonstrate self-awareness, sensitivity to others, and the skills needed to relate to diverse individuals, groups, and classrooms (CACREP, 2009); provide individual and group counselling and classroom guidance to promote the academic, career, and personal/social development of students; understand curriculum design, lesson plan development, classroom management strategies, and differentiated instructional strategies for teaching, counselling, and guidance-related material; conduct programs designed to enhance student academic development; implement differentiated instructional strategies that draw on subject matter and pedagogical content knowledge and skills to promote student achievement; understand the school counsellor's role in student assistance programs, school leadership, curriculum, and advisory meetings; plan and present school-counselling-related educational programs for use with parents and teachers (for example parent education programs, materials used in classroom guidance and advisor/advisee programs for teachers). While PSC's continue to be called to facilitate classroom guidance lessons, there will also be a call for counsellor educators to provide effective training for them within their graduate programs (CACREP, 2009).

Regarding the training of school counsellors, CACREP (2001) states that the standards require that graduates are knowledgeable about issues that may affect the development and functioning of students (e.g. abuse, violence, eating disorders, attention deficit hyperactive disorder, childhood depression, and suicide). CACREP requires counsellor education programs to provide instruction pertaining to the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the development of school counselling comprehensive programs (e.g., ASCA National Model for School Counselling Programs, 2005). In addition, counsellor education programs must include educational materials about various systems that affect students at school and home in order to be aware of the multitude of issues that affect academic success (CACREP, 2001).

Furthermore, Holcomb-McCoy (1998) suggests that in order for school counsellors to be effective when working with an urban population they must have gone through training that; address urban education and issues, must study multicultural issues extensively, understand how to coordinate counselling for the entire school community and have leadership skills to initiate collaborative efforts with other school personnel, have skills and knowledge to develop programs that support and encourage families to participate in the education of the their children, and have skills to assist students with possible emotional disorders and dysfunctional behaviors and also provide treatment and prevention. In addition, Holcomb-McCoy (2005) claims that school counselling programs are most effective when there is a balance between intervention responses and proactive prevention. In

line with this, Paisley and Benshoff (1996) cited in Walley (2009) state that although there is variability in training for school counsellors, incorporation of specific areas of knowledge into counsellors training program is necessary to ensure that school counsellors are prepared to practice appropriate interventions.

The ASCA National Model for the Training of School Counsellors.

The American School Counsellor Association (ASCA) positions that school counsellors are best prepared through master's-level and doctoral-level programs that align with the philosophy and vision of the ASCA National Model (2019), the ASCA School Counsellor Professional Standards and Competencies (2019), the ASCA Standards for School Counselling Program Preparation (2019), the ASCA Mindsets and Behaviors for Student Success (2014) and the ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counsellors (2016). These programs emphasize training in the implementation of a school counselling program that enhances student achievement and success.

The rationale is that school counsellors are assuming an increasingly important role in education, and school counselling preparation programs are vital to the appropriate development of that role. School counsellors significantly contribute to outcomes used to measure the success of students and schools; therefore, students in school counsellor preparation programs need direct training and supervision in leadership and the implementation of a school counselling program (Cinotti, 2014) cited in ASCA (2018).

The ASCA National Model (2019), the ASCA Ethical Standards (2016), the ASCA School Counsellor Professional Standards and Competencies (2019) and the ASCA Mindsets and Behaviors (2014) have significantly influenced school counsellor preparation and practice. These initiatives have placed significant attention on the preparation of school counsellors, ensuring graduates are well-prepared to design, implement and assess a school counselling program that is proactive, accountable and aligned with the school's mission. Effective school counselling preparation programs provide coursework and training that teaches school counselling students to design and implement a school counselling program. According to ASCA National Model (2019) these programs help school counselling students develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to: Understand the organizational structure and governance of the educational system, as well as cultural, political and social influences on current educational practices. Address legal, ethical and professional issues in schools. Understand developmental theory, counselling theory, career counselling theory, social justice theory and multiculturalism.

The ASCA National Model (2019) also asserts that training programs should enable school counselors to: Understand mental health and the continuum of services, including prevention and intervention strategies for addressing academic, career and social/emotional development to enhance student success for all students. Deliver effective instruction, appraisal and advisement, and counselling. Collaborate and consult with stakeholders (for example families/guardians, teachers, administration, and community stakeholders) to create learning environments promoting student educational equity and success for all students. Identify impediments to student learning, developing strategies to enhance learning and collaborating with stakeholders to improve student achievement. Ensure equitable access to resources promoting academic achievement, social/emotional growth and career development for all students. Use advocacy and data-informed school counselling practices to close achievement and opportunity gaps. Understand how the school counselling programs relate to the educational program. Understand outcome research data and best practices as identified in the school counselling research literature. Understand the importance of serving on school leadership teams and acting as educational leaders (ASCA National Model, 2019).

Furthermore, the ASCA National Model (2019) prescribes that field-based experiences are essential to the preparation of school counsellors. These experiences should provide training that aligns with the school counsellor preparation program and further develops the student's knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to implement a school counselling program. Field-based experiences are supervised by a licensed or certified school counsellor in the pre-K–12 setting and a university supervisor with the appropriate school counsellor educator qualifications.

School counselling preparation programs are facilitated by school counsellor educators who have the knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to prepare school counsellors to promote the academic, career and social/emotional development of all students. School counsellor educators have appropriate preparation, including knowledge of the ASCA National Model, the ASCA School Counselling Professional Standards & Competencies, organization and administration of pre-K–12 schools, counselling children and adolescents, and current issues and trends in school counselling. School counsellor educators should hold an earned doctoral degree in counsellor education, counselling psychology, educational leadership or closely related field. Adjunct faculty/instructors will minimally have an earned master's degree in school counselling and have school counselling experience. All university instructors should have experience as an employed school counsellor in the field.

Summarily, ASCA stipulates that school counsellor preparation programs should emphasize development of the knowledge, attitudes and skills essential for the implementation of effective school counselling programs. These programs align with the philosophy and vision of the ASCA National Model (2019), the ASCA School Counsellor Professional Standards & Competencies (2019), the ASCA Mindsets and Behaviors (2014) and the ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counsellors (2017), creating a program empowering all students to succeed and achieve in their pre-K–12 experiences. School counsellor educators have the appropriate education, training, experience and commitment to prepare school counsellors able to respond to the changing expectations and dynamics of students, families, schools and communities.

The Practice of School Counselling

According to ASCA (2005), the practice of counselling means rendering or offering to render to individuals, groups, organizations or the general public any service involving the application of principles, skills, techniques, methods or procedures of the counselling profession, including appraisal activities, counselling, consulting and referral activities. Ojo (2005) opines that there are three main ways through which counselling can be carried out:

Directive Counselling: Under directive counselling the counsellor issues certain instructions to the counsellee or he is directed to do certain things e.g he is asked to behave in a particular manner, asked to abstain from alcohol or drug, asked to respect his colleagues and superiors.

Non Directive Counselling: Under non directive counselling counsellor does not issue directions but observe the behaviour and attitude of the counsellee towards his work and his colleagues and superiors and subordinates. If he errs then counsellor comes to his rescue and corrects him realizing him that he was wrong. He will not issue him any instructions or will not direct him.

Eclectic Counselling: Eclectic counselling is a combination of directive and non-directive technique depending upon the situational factors. This approach in counselling is best characterised by its freedom to the counsellor to use whatever procedures or techniques seem to be the most appropriate to any particular time for any particular client. This counselling is one where one who is willing to utilize any procedures which hold promise even though their theoretical bases differed markedly. This counselling recognizes that each theory may contain some truth and that so long as a final decision between theories can't be made practical necessity justifiably takes precedence over orthodoxy. The counsellor in this counselling may start with directive technique but switches over to non-directive counselling if the situation requires. He may also start with the non-directive technique and switches over to directive techniques if the situation demands. So the counsellor in this counselling makes use of directive and non-directive counselling and also of any other type which may be considered useful for the purpose of modifying the ideas and attitudes of the counsellee. Ojo (2005) further state that counselling takes place in two major ways, namely: individual counselling and group counselling.

Individual Counselling: This is referred to as one-to-one counselling. It occurs between the trained counsellor (therapist) and his client (counsellee). The goal of this is to help the client to understand himself, clarify and direct his thought, in order to make a worthwhile decision. Through this, clients' problems are alleviated. Ojo (2005) remarked that it is mainly to bring about change in the client

either by altering maladaptive behavior, learning the decision-making process or preventing problems.

Group Counselling: also known as classroom guidance, large group counselling or a psycho-educational group is as an integral part of a school's counselling program (Dinkmeyer and Owens, 1969; Geltner, 2007; Gladding, 2008; Gysbers, 2001) cited in Gonzalez (2011). This is a counselling session that takes place between a trained counsellor and a group of people. The number of clients in a group should not be more than seven, or at least ten, in order to have a cohesive group and an effective well controlled counselling session. Members of the group are clients/counselees whose tasks or problems that are meant for resolution are similar. During group counselling, a free atmosphere is allowed and freedom of speech is encouraged. The counselees are free to express themselves individually as counselling progresses so that problems to be resolved would be open for all to consider and benefit from. All counselees express their feelings and the counsellor during group counselling is to help remove the masks covering the problem. He helps open up the problem with the professional competence and knowledge he possesses. The counsellor is not just a member of the group; he is to direct the affairs and situations (Ojo, 2005). School counsellors serve a vital role in maximizing student success (Lapan, Gysbers, and Petroski, 2003). Through leadership, advocacy and collaboration, school counsellors promote equity and access to rigorous educational experiences for all students. School counsellors support a safe learning environment and work to safeguard the human rights of all members of the school community (Sandhu, 2000) and address the needs of all students through culturally relevant prevention and intervention programs that are a part of a comprehensive school counselling program (Lee, 2001). The American School Counsellor Association recommends a school-counsellor-to-student ratio of 1:250. In reality this ratio is not respected as most school counsellors are often over loaded.

Egbo (2008) opines that the rationale for guidance and counselling in schools is based on the belief that prevention is always better than cure in every aspect of life. She therefore noted that counselling no doubt has the key for the prevention of almost all the problems associated with learning therefore the need to understand the services provided under the school guidance program. The school should make arrangements to enlist the support of the parents and introduce them to the idea of guidance and counselling. Therefore, in an effective guidance and counselling programme, various guidance and counselling services are offered to assist students in personal development and psychological growth towards maturity. It takes a well-trained guidance counsellor to effectively implement a guidance and counselling programme, with its various guidance and counselling services which are offered to assist students in personal development and psychological growth towards maturity. According to Schertzer and Stone (1976) cited in Tita-Nghamun, these services include:

Orientation Services: Orientation service is provided to new comers and those who go to a new class or new course in the school set up. It is a well-known fact that new students in a school or those who gain promotion into higher classes are heterogeneous in nature as they are from different family backgrounds, from different socio-economic status, from different areas, and from different abilities, interests, aptitudes and skills (Obinaju, 2011) cited in Tita-Nghamun (2016). Orientation service is normally meant for students to enable them to know school courses, rules, regulations, different facilities given to the students by school and to know the clear image of the school. On the same line school also keeps record of the students about their bio-data including identification, socio-economic background, capacities and abilities, interest for courses etc.

Assessment Services: Appraisal involves the collection, administration, interpretation and clinical usage of variety of test devices in order to provide effective counselling services to both pupils and students in a given institution (Akinade, 2012) cited in Tita-Nghamun (2016). This involves a teacher counsellor collecting, analysing and using a variety of objective data that can enhance better understanding of pupils/students related issues. A teacher counsellor without adequate and reliable information of a pupil/student will have difficulties in assisting him/her (Makinde, 1984) cited in Tita-Nghamun (2016). It is therefore important to collect and make available a variety of information through observation, interview, testing, history, and social adjustment data about each child so that they can be in a position to plan a satisfying educational, vocational and social programme.

Individual Inventory Service or Appraisal Service is an important type of guidance service which may be recognized often as “pupil's” inventory service. It is very much essential for pupils as it enables the student to know “himself” at the time of taking any decisions regarding his education and career. Really the pupils or student proceeds in his educational set-up as he/she has made proper choice regarding concerned subject or courses according to his own abilities, interests, aptitudes, attitudes and skills. The adequate and accurate data are collected for the same purpose Egbo (2008).

Educational and Occupational Information Services: These services have the aim of providing students with better knowledge of educational, vocational and social opportunities that can be used to make better- and well-informed decisions. In universities and secondary schools, students need at all times to make decisions about their education, career and social life. Mutie and Kochhar (1992) cited in Tita-Nghamun (2016) observe that students need information related to job opportunities, training opportunities, and academic qualifications. Tita-Nghamun (2016) further opines that students must not only be exposed to such information but must also have an opportunity to react to it in a meaningful way with others.

Counselling Service is designed to help an individual student analyze himself/herself by relating their capabilities, achievements, interests and mode of adjustment to what new decision they have to make Gichinga (1995) cited in Tita-Nghamun (2016). This service is very critical for the students because they need it to solve career, academic, personal and social problems which they encounter in life. The service is designed to facilitate self-understanding through individual or group relationships. Kyungu (1994) cited in Tita-Nghamun (2016) supports this by observing that effective guidance and counselling in secondary schools and other learning institutions has become extremely important in guiding students on the relationship between health and the environment, life-earning skills, the knowledge and attitudes that lead to success or failure in life. Effective counselling service should assist in improving the self-image of the students and facilitate better achievement in academic performance.

The Placement and Follow-up Service is very essential at the end of secondary school education, where students need to decide on the next step after secondary school. This service assists students in selecting subject combinations required for particular courses and choosing the right careers. Makinde (1984) cited in Tita-Nghamun (2016) states that placement service is designed to aid an individual to select and utilize opportunities within the school and in the labour market. Follow-up services are needed follow or trace a student after school and to the world of work. School counsellors develop a systematic plan for maintaining contacts with former students.

The Referral Service: Tita-Nghamun (2016) opines that this is the act of transferring an individual to another person or agency providing different kind of assistance. Referral is made for the purpose of specialized assistance. Many referrals occur simply because the problem is beyond the scope of the services provided. He further opines that referral service is intended to channel up students who need special care into specialized institutions which can better help them.

Collaboration Service: Collaboration in any organisation is vital as it enhances efficient and effective delivery of services. In the provision of guidance services, the different units of the Ministry of Secondary Education, at all levels, need to work together in order to achieve the common goal which is developing a learner into a responsible citizen in all spheres of life.

Consultation Service: In its endeavour to provide effective guidance services, the school guidance services unit at all levels makes consultations with other units within the Ministry of Secondary Education at the various levels.

Coordination Service: The school guidance and counselling service unit coordinates guidance activities in conjunction with other sections. Coordination is vital in the implementation of guidance activities because it yields effective results.

Gysbers (2006) in line with the above-mentioned counselling services opines that evaluation of guidance and counselling programs consists of making systematic judgments of the relative effectiveness with which goals are attained in relation to specified standards. He states that in

evaluating a function like guidance and counselling services, the counsellor attempts to determine to what extent the objectives of the service have been attained. Evaluating the effectiveness of a school's guidance and counselling services is very important (Gysbers, 2006). Evaluation is the means by which school personnel can better judge the extent to which these objectives are being met (Popham, 2010).

Skills Acquired by School Counsellors during Training

McLeod and McLeod (2011) opine that counselling skills are facilitating abilities acquired by counsellors to enable them in solving their clients' problems. McLeod & McLeod (2011) believe that practical skills improve actual physical activity. To be successful counsellors therefore, it is important that counsellors in training should be equipped with several counselling skills that they can use when they are in counselling relationships with their clients (McLeod and McLeod, 2011). They further state that there are various types of counselling skills which school counsellors need to acquire in order to be effective. These skills include: advocacy, ICT skills, leadership, managerial, attending, attunement, bodily awareness, boundary management, caring, challenging, checking out, naming, observing, offering feedback, process monitoring, providing information, questioning, reflecting, restating, reframing, remembering, self-disclosure, self-monitoring, structuring, using silence and witnessing. These skills are not mutually exclusive as several of them are interwoven and interrelated (McLeod and McLeod, 2011).

Listening Skill: The first skill to be acquired by any practicing counsellor is the listening skill. This involves paying attention to every statement involving body movement or sign that a client makes in a counselling encounter. Listening skill is a crucial skill that helps to establish core conditions of counselling like openness, trust, self-confidence, love and worthiness or belongingness. The counsellor in the process of listening attentively to his clients' presentations indulges in paraphrasing his statements, perception checks, reaction to sudden body movement, non-judgmental statements, restatements and clarifications. These are things that ensure the client that his/her counsellor is responsive, empathic, and listening to his/her problems with a view to finding solutions that are appropriate. The counsellor should avoid what the client did not say or omit what he/she said.

Questioning Skill: This skill is a basic and a formidable skill of counselling relationships which promotes greater client disclosure. There are two types of questioning: open-ended and close-ended questioning. In counselling, open-ended questioning seeks to elicit information from clients using "how" and "what" instead of "why". Open-ended questions can be answered in one word or in a phrase. The client is made to progress from generalisations to specifics with more detailed information and clarity of points. At the onset of counselling, an open-ended question can lead a client into telling a story in his/her own way. In a situation whereby a counsellor is interested in knowing the birth order of his/her client, he/she can ask his client to talk to him about his family. The close-ended question on the other hand places a lot of restriction on clients' responses and statements about his problems. In this case, the client supplies only the needed answer as required unlike in the open-ended questioning where the client provides the required answer and goes ahead to supply other information that might be useful later.

Summarization Skill: This is the ability to pick major points of a conversation to bring about corrections or confirmation of information. This is an important counselling skill as it assures the counsellees that the counsellors usually hear the correct content of their problems. Summarisation skill encourages clients to probe their points by themselves. It can be used in the beginning of a counselling session to bring a synergy between the previous counselling session and the current one or to reflect on the problem earlier presented by the client(s). Also, summarisation can be applied in-between counselling sessions or midway into a counselling relationship to remind the counsellor and his client of what they have done so far or at the end of a counselling session to mark the end of the session.

Reframing Skill: This is a skill used by counsellors to give alternative statements or perspectives of what clients say. Reframing is used to keep clients at alert and to challenge their cognitions. Through positive or negative alternative expressions of what a client has said, the counsellor can manipulate

the information presented. The counselor might decide to reframe a client's statement in a neutral version but in the end, the client is led through to full meaning and awareness of his problem. The client is also encouraged to explore the values of what he has said. For instance, a client might state that his major problem in school is distraction from friends during prep classes. In response to this, the counsellor might reframe the statement by saying, "Your friends distract your studies and perhaps cause you to perform poorly in assessments".

Paraphrasing Skill: paraphrasing counselling skill is the ability to respond to client's statements while expressing their problems in phrases. The counsellor uses phrases to build, blend and facilitate what the client says. It involves what the client has said and what he intends to say. This skill gives clients confidence and assurance that the counsellor is actively involved in their problems by listening attentively. Through this the clients correct misconceptions about certain information given about problems presented. One good thing about paraphrasing skill is that it facilitates reflective thinking, feelings and processing of information during counselling sessions. Additionally, it gives clients feedback and room for further exploration of thoughts and feelings. Like reframing skill, it enables clients to be led through feelings and cognitive challenges. It clarifies clients' problem-statements with a view to bringing a clearer picture of their intentions.

Empathy Skill: This is otherwise called reflection of feeling skill where the counsellor demonstrates to his/her clients that he/she is aware of their feelings and emotions. It conveys the counsellor's understanding of the clients' problems and feelings. According to Onah (2002) cited in McLeod and McLeod (2011), empathy implies an attitude in which the counsellor is able to sense the hurt or pleasure as another person sees it; to perceive the causes of a client's problems as he perceives them, but without ever losing their cognition that it is "as if" he was the person involved. He/She maintains that empathy facilitates counselling as it conveys to the client the message that much value is placed on him/her and that the feelings and meanings which he/she attaches to his experiences are respected and worth attending to. This no doubt makes a client in a counselling relation to feel a sense of belonging, reassurance, love and relaxation. In applying empathy skill, the counsellor needs to let his client understand that he too feels the way he, the client feels about his experience. If a student reports to his/her counsellor that he/she often feels rejected by his classmates, the counsellor can respond by saying, "it is like you are feeling lonely and isolated each time you are in the class" or "it sounds as if you are yet to make friends in your class".

Reflection of Meaning Skill: This suggests attentiveness or intense listening with emphasis on literal meaning of clients' problems or experiences. This skill enables the therapist to understand the client's major concern, mood, feelings and expectations while it enables the client to learn that the therapist has heard not only the surface of his experience but also the inner or deeper meaning of it. The skill of reflection of meaning as a facilitator of counselling conveys information about clients' experience as well as the counsellor's perceptions of his situation.

Capping Counselling Skill: This skill is similar to, but different from the skill of reflection of feelings (empathy). Here, the counsellor tries to move his/her client along from emotion-laden situations to cognitively restructured situations. He/She engages his/her clients in discussions that task their cognitions in order to realise themselves. The counsellor can introduce humor here but must be very careful, plain, sincere and natural in the counselling relationships. The counsellor's attribute of genuineness comes to play in this regard as whatever he/she says and feels must be reliable and the same over time. Onah (2002) warns that the counsellor trying to demonstrate his/her genuineness should not attempt to be phony as it is very risky to do so.

Interpretation Skill: This skill is the act of drawing an analysis of what a client is presenting before his/her counsellor. It is embellished in cognitive counselling to give explanations and meaning to unconscious thoughts and feelings. The counsellor employing this skill gives interpretation or meaning to actions that might be responsible for a client's particular behaviour. The client on the other hand can accept or reject such analysis and/or seek for more clarifications if in doubt especially if the analysis is incredibly inaccurate and outrageous. For instance, a client might present a dream he/she had where an old woman was chasing him/her with a cutlass. In an attempt to interpret the dream during counselling session, the counsellor can tell the client that the old woman represented a

witch who is bent on terminating his/her life or at least retard his/her progress in life. It is now left for the client to accept or reject the interpretation given to the dream by the counsellor. Which ever option the client finally takes at the end of the counseling sessions will depend on the interplay of other skills employed by the counsellor during their interpretations. Interpretation to some extent is highly subjective especially in dream analysis.

Verbal Tracking Skill: One of the good qualities of trained counsellors is the ability to actively listen to their clients as they present and explain their problems. This often followed by verbal tracking through which the counsellor verbally follows the client as he reflects on his problems. He paraphrases the client's statements through appropriate and constant interjections instead of mere listening without verbal reactions. In this circumstance, body gestures are not enough. The counsellor uses words that the client often utters to rephrase or paraphrase his/her statements. This makes the client to feel important, relevant and listened to during counselling relationships. Besides, effective use of verbal tracking assists counsellors in taking or summarising notes during and after counselling sessions. It also builds and sustains rapport, confidence, genuineness, empathy, sense of responsibility and respect. For instance, a client who reports to his/her counsellor that he/she was tired of life due to poor grades in his/her subjects might be responded to by the counsellor saying: "Are you saying that you often obtain poor grades in your academic subjects?" This seems repetition but it sends unquantified message to the student as he/she might come up with more explicit information about the situation in an attempt to agree with the counsellor on what he paraphrased.

Challenge is another skill required by a school counsellor to practice effectively. According to BACP (2007), challenge is used in a gentle and encouraging way and is in no way confrontational. An example might be 'last session when you talked about this, you said that it made you angry but as you are talking now, you sound more hurt.' The counsellor is challenging the client's statement but not in an aggressive or disbelieving manner.

Immediacy skill: BACP (2007) also recommended immediacy as a crucial skill which the school counsellor needs to possess in order to practice effectively. Immediacy is working in the here-and-now rather than the past or the future. It could be current feelings or a situation and may even be relating to the relationship between counsellor and client. In other words, when a school counsellor is using immediacy, she/he is trying to get the real situation as it is at the moment.

Self-disclosure Skill: BACP (2007) recommends that school counsellors need to be equipped with the skill of self-disclosure. Self-disclosure is a difficult skill to use and takes a lot of experience to get right. Some environments (for instance, addiction services or rape crisis) allow self-disclosure, as the counsellor making the client aware of personal experience can improve the bond or relationship. However, the danger is that the counsellor may distract from the client's situation, reducing the sense of uniqueness of experience, or just introduces a tangent that allows the client to focus away from their own issues. Thus, in using this skill the school counselor is required to do it meticulously (BACP, 2007).

Focus: It is difficult to imagine how chaotic a session may be without the counsellor helping the client to focus on their issue and helping them to examine around it! In conversations we go off on tangents and talk about ourselves, but this wouldn't be therapeutic for the client so cannot be done. There has to be total concentration to work through the client's choice of issue so that some therapeutic development can take place.

Evaluation tends to come nearer the end of the counselling relationship when the counsellor encourages the client to reflect back over a change or development that has occurred and assess its value in the context of their life. This helps coping mechanisms emerge as the client is able to identify what works and what does not for them. It may well be that after the evaluation, the session reverts back to a previous stage where planning takes place and the cycle begins again. Alternatively, if successful, this can be the end of the counselling sessions. As you can imagine, all of these take quite a lot of practice, particularly when using some of them at the same time. Counselling really is very different to an ordinary conversation (BACP, 2007).

In line with the provisions of BACP (2007) regarding the skills which counsellors need to practice, Macleod (2011) cited in Ruttoh (2014), postulated that counsellors are expected to acquire the following skills and qualities:

Interpersonal skills: Competent counsellors are able to demonstrate appropriate listening, communication, empathy, awareness of non-verbal communication, sensitive to voice quality, responsiveness, to expression of emotions, structuring time and use of language. These views are in tandem with Lutomia and Sikolia (2008) who argue that good counsellors have the ability to interact through skills such as liking and being a good listener. Students like a counsellor whom they are free to share their problems with and are able to show patience, empathy and an attitude of caring.

Personal beliefs and attitudes: Good counsellors should have the capacity to accept others, belief in the potential for change, awareness of ethical and moral choices and sensitivity to values held by others and self. Lutomia and Sikolia (2008) further added that counsellors need to appreciate personal differences in order to deal with each case on its own merit.

Mastery of techniques: Counsellors should have knowledge of when and how to carry out specific interventions, ability to assess effectiveness of intervention, understanding of rationale behind the techniques used and professionally able to handle all types of interventions. The school counsellor should have the ability to understand and assess the student problem, to anticipate future consequences of the action taken and be able to remember the information of the student at all times.

Ability to understand and work within social systems: Counsellors need to appreciate work and social dynamics in order to be effective. Systems such as family, work relationships of the client and the ability to use support networks and supervision are critical. The above entails being sensitive to the social worlds of clients drawn from different backgrounds, gender, ethnic and socio-economic orientations.

In addition to the skills recommended by BACP (2007), the USAID/Zambia's Read to Succeed Project (2010) in its Participants' Handout in Guidance and Counselling also highlights the following skills as important for the practice of guidance and counselling within the school milieu: patient, genuine, approachable, pragmatic, spontaneous, non-judgemental, good conduct and communication. Other qualities include warmth, care, tolerance, creativity, democratic, confidentiality, sense of humour, self-respect and respect to others, and observes the ethical principles of confidentiality.

To further stress the importance of knowledge and skills acquisition, Ndirangu (2000) cited in Tita-Nghamun (2016) concedes that the counsellor should be well grounded in clinical psychology where it is dictated by the maxim that all behavior is caused. The teacher-counsellor requires knowledge of some cultural values and beliefs of most of the clientele he or she handles within the learning institution. This is crucial because cultural misinterpretation may mean long-term damage to the client. It is not a wonder then that the Map Robinson Report (1987) comments that guidance and counselling for individuals has always formed part of the African strategy for combining personality problems and may be practiced by indigenous counsellors. The Witmer (1990) Report endorses this argument by remarking that counsellors should always be cognizant of the cultural conditions and changes. Teacher-counsellor should design comprehensive guidance programmes, provide counselling service and use assessment procedures with a gender perspective. Lack of training of counsellors in gender analysis may lead many providers of guidance to render services and/or organize activities that may continue to maintain and enforce the already existing stereotype. Counselling skills are learned over time and should be practiced by a professional counsellor as much as possible. Counselling is a purposeful process which leads client to move understanding of themselves and others; the counsellor should therefore be conversant with the listening skill. Counselling is process and theory based (Tita-Nghamun, 2016).

Objective

To examine the skills acquired by school counsellors during training and its influence on their practice.

Research Question

To what extent do the skills acquired by school counsellors during training influence their practice?

Research Hypothesis

Ho1: The skills acquired by school counsellors during training have no significant influence on their practice.

Ha1: The skills acquired by school counsellors during training have a significant influence on their practice.

METHODOLOGY

The concurrent nested mixed-method research design was used in conducting this study. To collect quantitative data, the descriptive survey design with the aid of a questionnaire made up of closed-ended items was used. Qualitative data was collected through the phenomenological approach with the aid of an interview guide made up of open-ended questions.

This study was carried out in Mfoundi and Mezam Divisions of the Center and North West Regions of Cameroon respectively. Specifically data was collected from resident school counsellors from these two regions.

The population of this study consisted of all resident school counsellors of the Center and North West Regions of Cameroon. These two regions were chosen purposefully because they have the characteristics of the population under study. The two regions also have training institutions for school counsellors. Also, the researcher wanted to have respondents from the two subsystems of education in Cameroon. The North West Region has a total of 209 resident school counsellors spread over government secondary schools in its seven divisions. The Center Region has a total of 710 resident school counsellors who are found in the different government secondary schools of its ten divisions. The target population consists of all resident school counsellors of both sexes of the Mfoundi and Mezam Divisions. Mezam Division has a total of 108 resident school counsellors while Mfoundi Division has a total of 305 resident school counsellors. The accessible population consists of resident school counsellors of selected government secondary schools of the Mezam and Mfoundi Divisions of the North West and Center Regions respectively.

Table 1: School Counsellors in the North West Region

S/N	DIVISION	NUMBER OF COUNSELLORS
1	BOYO	20
2	BUI	25
3	DONGA-MANTUNG	15
4	MENCHUM	16
5	MEZAM	108
6	MOMO	11
7	NGO-KETUNJIA	14
	TOTAL	209

Source: North West Regional Delegation for Secondary Education (2023).

Table 2: School Counsellors in the Center Region

S/N	Division	Number of Counsellors
1	HAUT-SANGA	58
2	LEKIE	50
3	MBAM-et-INOUBOU	40
4	MBAM-et-KIM	20
5	MEFOU-et-AFAMBA	50
6	MEFOU-et-AKONO	102

7	MFOUNDI	305
8	NYONG-et-KELLE	30
9	NYONG-et-MFOUMOU	25
10	NYONG-et-SO'O	30
	TOTAL	710

Source: Center Regional Delegation for Secondary Education (2023).

The sample for this study was drawn from the accessible population of 262 resident school counsellors, 80 from Mezam Division and 182 from Mfoundi Division. Due to the limited number of counsellors in the 25 accessible schools in Mezam Division, the sample size constitutes all 80 counsellors in the 25 accessible schools and all 169 from the 182 counsellors in the 16 schools in Mfoundi division. In total, the sample size of the study consists of 249 counsellors out of the accessible of 262 counsellors in the 41 accessible schools in both divisions.

The sample size for the study was estimated directly using sample calculation for one proportion for survey study with the help of EpiInfo 7.0 using a higher design effect of 1.6 and not 1.0 used by the Krejcie and Morgan table which only estimated the minimum sample size of every given population for survey studies. Thus, using a higher design effect of above 1.0, it enabled the researcher to collect adequate information/data from respondents thus increasing the internal and external validity of the study and its findings. It also enables the researcher to confidently generalize the findings of the study to the population. Below is the formula used for the sample size estimation with the support of EpiInfo 7.0, a statistical software design by Center for Disease Control in USA.

$$\frac{NZ^2P(1-P)}{d^2(N-1) + Z^2P(1-P)}$$

Where:

N=Total number of participants

Z= Z value corresponding to the confidence level, =95%

d= absolute precision =5% (It should be noted that the smaller the precision, the higher the sample size and the more reliable the findings). A precision value of 5% was then considered acceptable for a good statistical significance.

P=expected proportion in the population =50% for optimal sample size estimation.

Design effect=1.6 (By this, the sample gotten at 1.0 was multiple by 1.6).

The researcher used both probability and non-probability sampling techniques to get the sample of this study. For the target population of this study, the convenient and purposive sampling techniques were used. To select the accessible population for school counsellors, the researcher did simple random sampling of the public secondary schools within Mezam and Mfoundi Divisions. This was to ensure that all the schools within the selected divisions had the probability of being included in the population of the study. After getting the schools from which respondents were drawn, the researcher did purposive and convenient sampling to get data from the counsellors within the schools selected. Purposive and convenient sampling were used here because some counsellors in the selected schools were on leave and some were not on seat so the researcher worked with those she met on seat. To get the required number of respondents, the researcher added more schools so as to get more respondents to replace those who were absent in the schools with the accessible population. Also, in Mezam since some of the schools chosen were not functional, the researcher had to do online delivery to the counsellors in those schools who then responded to the instrument. The research instruments used to collect data were the questionnaire and interview guide.

The data collected from the field was first processed using EpiData 3.1 whereby, all the participants' responses were keyed, in accordance with each of the test items. During this process of data entering, the demographic information and the test items were coded with numbers to facilitate the data entering and the questionnaires were also assigned with serial numbers. The reason for coding and

assigning each questionnaire a serial number was to ensure that on the data base, one should easily trace the individual responses of participants and to carry out any verification in areas of uncertainty if need arise. After the data was completely entered for all the participants, the data base was exported to SPSS version 25 for further consistency, data range and validation checks with the purpose to first identify invalid codes (data cleaning) with the aid of exploratory statistics such as frequency count, and outliers.

After the data were thoroughly checked for possible errors, the quantitative data were analyzed using the descriptive and inferential statistical tools. The descriptive statistical tools used are frequency count, percentages and multiple responses set which aimed at calculating the summary of findings for each variable for a quick comprehension of the overall findings. Furthermore, to examine the skills acquired by school counsellors during training and its influence on practice, the Pearson's test was used because the data for the variables were approximately normally distributed for many of the variables based on the statistics of the test of normality assumption trend of the data. The testing for normality assumption of every data is very important in order to know the right statistical tests to be applied when computing correlation analysis to void committing type 1 or 2 hypotheses error.

On the other, the qualitative data derived from open ended questions was analyzed using the thematic analysis approach with the aid of themes and quotations. The themes refer to the umbrella words which captured the main idea of the participants' statements and the quotations are the direct words from the participants. Finally, findings were presented using frequency distribution and thematic tables and on charts with all inferential statistics presented at 95% level of confidence interval with alpha set at 0.05 levels, accepting 5% margin of error.

FINDINGS

The Practice of School Counsellors

Ten structured items were used to measure counsellors' opinion on their practice and the findings are presented on table 3 below.

Table 3: Counsellors Appraisal of their Field Practice

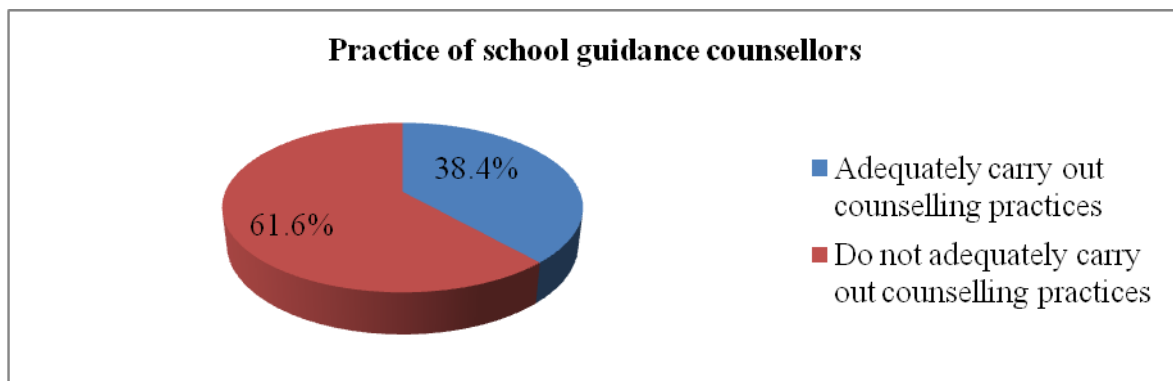
Statements	Stretched				Collapsed	
	SA	A	D	SD	SA/A	D/SD
My training did not adequately prepare me to render orientation services in school	60 (24.4%)	123 (50.0%)	47 (19.1%)	16 (6.5%)	183 (74.4%)	63 (25.6%)
I am unable to effectively carry out assessment service towards my clients	48 (19.5%)	121 (49.2%)	71 (28.9%)	6 (2.4%)	169 (68.7%)	77 (31.3%)
I do not render educational and occupational information services effectively	52 (21.1%)	157 (63.8%)	30 (12.2%)	7 (2.8%)	209 (85.0%)	37 (15.0%)
My training did not equip me to effectively provide counselling services to my client	42 (17.1%)	158 (64.2%)	33 (13.4%)	13 (5.3%)	200 (81.3%)	46 (18.7%)
I do not satisfactorily carry out placement and follow-up service.	33 (13.4%)	76 (30.9%)	120 (48.8%)	17 (6.9%)	109 (44.3%)	137 (55.7%)
I do not adequately offer appraisal service to my clients	25 (10.2%)	87 (35.4%)	123 (50.0%)	11 (4.5%)	112 (45.5%)	134 (54.5%)
Follow-up, research and evaluation service I offer to my clients is not done sufficiently	16 (6.5%)	66 (26.8%)	149 (60.6%)	15 (6.1%)	82 (33.3%)	164 (66.7%)
I do not sufficiently render	32	135	66	13	167	79

consultative services to my clients	(13.0%)	(54.9%)	(26.8%)	(5.3%)	(67.9%)	(32.1%)
My training did not adequately equip me to effectively do referrals.	36 (14.6%)	120 (48.8%)	79 (32.1%)	11 (4.5%)	156 (63.4%)	90 (36.6%)
I do not satisfactorily carry out coordination service.	25 (10.2%)	103 (41.9%)	107 (43.5%)	11 (4.5%)	127 (51.6%)	118 (48.0%)
Multiple Responses Set (MRS)	368 (15.0%)	1146 (46.6%)	825 (33.6%)	120 (4.9%)	1515 (61.6%)	945 (38.4%)

Table 3 above shows counsellors’ appraisal of their field practice. In aggregate, based on counsellors’ opinion on practice, 61.6% of them said that their training did not adequately prepared them for practice while 38.4% said training adequately prepared them for practice. Specifically, majority of counsellors 183 (74.4%) accepted that their training did not adequately prepare them to render orientation services in school while 63 (25.6%) disagreed. Also, 169 (68.7%) counsellors accepted that they are unable to effectively carry out assessment service towards clients while 77 (31.3%) disagreed. In the same trend, majority of counsellors 209 (85.0%) said they are unable to effectively render educational and occupational information services while 37 (15.0%) said they could effectively do that.

Again, 200 (81.3%) counsellors also opined that their training did not equip them to effectively provide counselling services to clients while 46 (18.7%) said it effectively equipped them. Furthermore, 109 (44.3%) counsellors also indicated that they do not satisfactorily carry out placement and follow-up services while 137 (55.7%) said they do. Findings also showed that 167 (67.9%) counsellors accepted that they do not sufficiently render consultative services to their clients while 79 (32.1%) disagreed to this. Similarly, 156 (63.4%) counsellors opined that their training did not adequately equip them to effectively do referrals while 90 (36.6%) said they were effectively equipped for referrals. Finally, 127 (51.6%) counsellors said they do not satisfactorily carry out coordination services while 118 (48.0%) of them does that satisfactorily. The overall finding on counsellors’ practices is also presented on the figure below.

Figure 1: Counsellors’ Appraisal of their Field Practice



The figure above shows school counsellors’ appraisal of their overall practice. In aggregate, 61.6% of counsellors admitted that they do not practice adequately while 38.4% said they do practice adequately.

Table 4 specifically compare counsellors’ opinion on their practice by demographic information. This is to enable us know the opinion for each category of participants as concern the practice of counselling.

Table 4: Comparing Counsellors Practice by Demographic Information

Demographic data			Practice		Total based on MRS
			Adequate	Inadequate	
Sex	Male	n	273	407	680
		%	40.1%	59.9%	

	Female	n	672	1107	1779
		%	37.8%	62.2%	
Age group	Below 36 years	n	237	522	759
		%	31.2%	68.8%	
	36-45 years	n	566	784	1350
		%	41.9%	58.1%	
	46-55 years	n	135	165	300
		%	45.0%	55.0%	
56 years and above	n	7	43	50	
	%	14.0%	86.0%		
Years of training	Below 2000	n	62	128	190
		%	32.6%	67.4%	
	2000 to 2005	n	67	73	140
		%	47.9%	52.1%	
	2006 to 2010	n	119	131	250
		%	47.6%	52.4%	
	2011to 2015	n	388	522	910
		%	42.6%	57.4%	
	2016 to 2020	n	298	572	870
		%	34.3%	65.7%	
	Above 2020	n	11	88	99
		%	11.1%	88.9%	
Training institution	ENS Bambili	n	84	205	289
		%	29.1%	70.9%	
	ENS Maroua	n	137	253	390
		%	35.1%	64.9%	
	ENS Yaoundé	n	357	463	820
		%	43.5%	56.5%	
	ENSET Bertoua	n	238	492	730
		%	32.6%	67.4%	
	ENSET Douala	n	7	43	50
		%	14.0%	86.0%	
	HTTTC Yaoundé	n	30.3	69.7	99
		%	20.0%	80.0%	
ENSET Kumba	n	11	19	30	
	%	40.0%	60.0%		
Years of practice	Less than 5 years	n	116	283	399
		%	29.1%	70.9%	
	5-10 years	n	579	861	1440
		%	40.2%	59.8%	
	11-15 years	n	116	154	270
		%	43.0%	57.0%	
	16-20 years	n	66	84	150
		%	44.0%	56.0%	
	Above 20 years	n	68	132	200
		%	34.0%	66.0%	
Highest qualification	DIPOCO	n	662	1048	1710
		%	38.7%	61.3%	
	Master's	n	283	466	749
		%	37.8%	62.2%	

Table 4 above compares counsellors' practice by demographic information. Comparing the counsellor's practice by demographic data, findings showed that irrespective of their sex, age group, training institution, year of training, years in practice and highest qualification, many of the counsellors with percentage ranging from 52.1% to 88.9% do not adequately carry out the counselling practice which is above 50%.

Research Question: To what extent do the skills acquired by school counsellors during training influence their practice?

Ten structured items were used to capture counsellors' opinion on their skills acquired during training and findings are presented on table 5 below.

Table 5: Counsellors Appraisal of Skills Acquired During Training

Statements	Stretched				Collapsed	
	SA	A	D	SD	SA/A	D/SD
My training did not enable me acquire adequate organizational skills.	31 (12.7%)	119 (48.6%)	60 (24.5%)	35 (14.3%)	150 (61.2%)	95 (38.8%)
Sometimes, I fail to listen keenly and actively when communicating with my clients	40 (16.3%)	134 (54.7%)	66 (26.9%)	5 (2.0%)	174 (71.0%)	71 (29.0%)
Often, I did not make effective use of both verbal and nonverbal language when communicating with my clients	9 (3.7%)	56 (22.8%)	148 (60.2%)	33 (13.4%)	65 (26.4%)	181 (73.6%)
My training did not adequately enable me to have program planning skills for counselling.	23 (9.3%)	154 (62.6%)	54 (21.9%)	15 (6.1%)	177 (71.9%)	69 (28.1%)
My training did not adequately enable me to have critical thinking skills.	43 (17.5%)	94 (38.2%)	85 (34.6%)	24 (9.8%)	137 (55.7%)	109 (44.3%)
Taking into consideration cultural differences always during counselling is hard for me.	41 (16.7%)	107 (43.5%)	78 (31.7%)	20 (8.1%)	148 (60.2%)	98 (39.8%)
My training did not adequately enable me to develop problem exploration and management skills	35 (14.2%)	152 (61.8%)	41 (16.7%)	18 (7.3%)	187 (76.0%)	59 (24.0%)
My training did not adequately enable me to develop good interpersonal relationship skills to my satisfaction.	42 (17.1%)	131 (53.3%)	59 (24.0%)	14 (5.7%)	173 (70.3%)	73 (29.7%)
Effective use of technology in practice is a problem to me.	59 (24.0%)	107 (43.5%)	60 (24.4%)	20 (8.1%)	166 (67.5%)	80 (32.5%)
My training did not adequately enable me to carry out advocacy	35 (14.2%)	128 (52.2%)	63 (25.7%)	19 (7.8%)	163 (66.5%)	82 (33.5%)
Multiple Responses Set (MRS)	337 (13.7%)	1191 (48.5%)	705 (28.7%)	224 (9.1%)	1528 (62.2%)	929 (37.8%)

Table 5 above shows counsellors appraisal of the skills they acquired during training. In aggregate, based on counsellors' opinion on skills acquired during training, 62.2% of the counsellors said skills acquire during training was inadequate while 37.8% said they acquired adequate skills during training. Specifically, 150 (61.2%) counsellors said their training did not enable them to acquire

adequate organizational skills while 95 (38.8%) disagreed. Also, 71 (29.0%) of counsellors accepted that they sometimes fail to effectively communicate with clients while 174 (71.0%) disagreed.

Furthermore, 177 (71.9%) counsellors accepted that their training did not adequately enable them to have program planning skills for counselling while 69 (28.1%) disagreed. Again, 137 (55.7%) counsellors accepted that their training did not adequately enable them to have critical thinking skills and problem solving skills while 109 (44.3%) disagreed.

In a similar trend, 148 (60.2%) counsellors accepted that always considering a cultural difference during counselling is hard for them while 98 (39.8%) disagreed. Furthermore, 187 (76.0%) counsellors also accepted that their training did not adequately enable them to develop problem exploration and management skills while 59 (24.0%) disagreed. Also 173 (70.3%) counsellors accepted that their training did not adequately enable them to develop good interpersonal relationship skills to their satisfaction while 73 (29.7%) denied.

Furthermore, more of the counsellors 166 (67.5%) accepted that the effective use of technology in practice is a problem to them while 80 (32.5%) disagreed. Finally, more of the counsellors 163 (66.5%) also accepted that their training did not adequately enable them to carry out advocacy while 82 (33.5%) disagreed. The overall finding on counsellors' appraisal of skills acquired during training is also presented on the figure below.

Figure 2: Counsellors Appraisal of Skills Acquired During Training

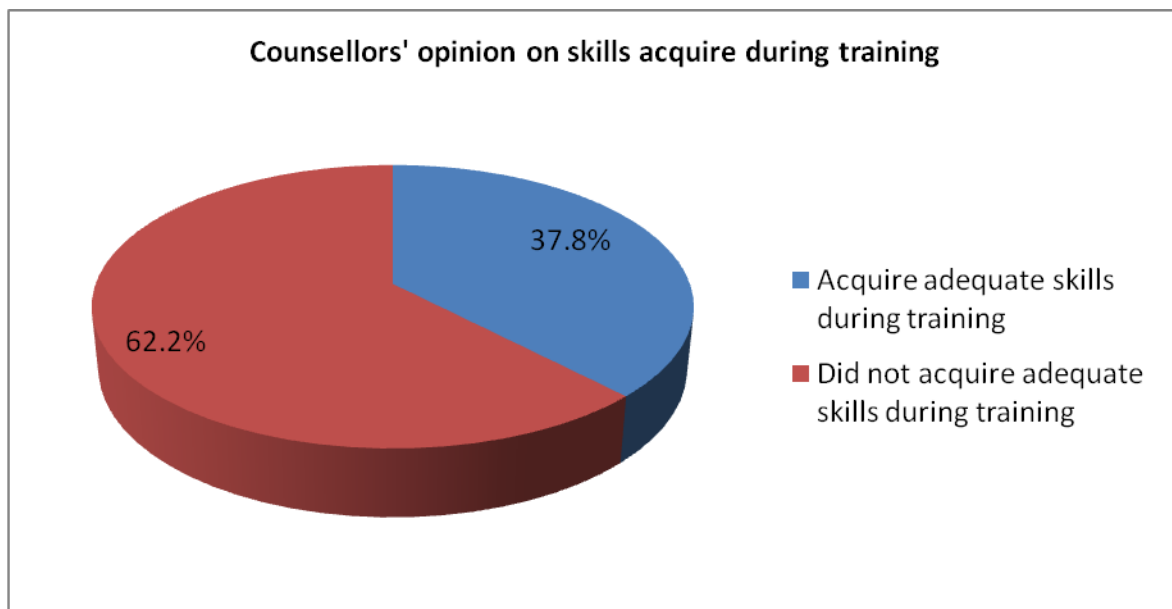


Figure 2 above shows counsellors' appraisal of skills acquired during training. The figure shows that in aggregate, 62.2% of school counsellors did not acquire adequate skills during training while 37.8% of them said they acquired adequate skills during training.

Table 6 specifically compares counsellors opinion on their skills acquired during training by demographic information. This is to enable us know the opinion of each category of participants as concern their skills acquired during training.

Table 6: Comparing Counsellors on Skills Acquired During Training by Demographic Information

Demographic data			Skills acquired during training		Total based on MRS
			Adequate	Inadequate	
Sex	Male	n	218	460	678
		%	32.2%	67.8%	
	Female	n	658	1121	1779
		%	27.0%	63.0%	
Age group	Below 36 years	n	276	482	758

	36-45 years	%	36.4%	63.6%	
		n	509	840	1349
	46-55 years	%	37.7%	62.3%	
		n	126	174	300
	56 years and above	%	42.0%	58.0%	
		n	17	33	50
Years of training	Below 2000	%	34.0%	66.0%	
		n	81	109	190
	2000 to 2005	%	42.6%	57.4%	
		n	45	95	140
	2006 to 2010	%	32.1%	67.9%	
		n	141	109	250
	2011to 2015	%	43.6%	56.4%	
		n	503	407	910
	2016 to 2020	%	44.7%	55.3%	
		n	336	532	868
	Above 2020	%	38.7%	61.3%	
		n	18	81	99
Training institution	ENS Bambili	%	18.2%	81.8%	
		n	110	180	290
	ENS Maroua	%	37.9%	62.1%	
		n	123	267	390
	ENS Yaoundé	%	31.5%	68.5%	
		n	303	517	820
	ENSET Bertoua	%	37.0%	63.0%	
		n	247	482	729
	ENSET Douala	%	33.9%	66.1%	
		n	20	29	49
	HTTTC Yaoundé	%	40.8%	59.2%	
		n	42	57	99
ENSET Kumba	%	42.4%	57.6%		
	n	12	18	30	
Years of practice	Less than 5 years	%	40.0%	60.0%	
		n	125	273	398
	5-10 years	%	31.4%	68.6%	
		n	625	814	1439
	11-15 years	%	43.4%	56.6%	
		n	122	148	270
	16-20 years	%	45.2%	54.8%	
		n	67	83	150
	Above 20 years	%	44.7%	55.3%	
		n	89	111	200
Highest qualification	DIPOCO	%	44.5%	55.5%	
		n	649	1059	1708
	Master's	%	38.0%	62.0%	
		n	277	472	749
		%	37.0%	63.0%	

From table 6 above, comparing the counsellors opinion on skills acquired during training by demographic data, findings showed that irrespective of their sex, age group, training institution, year of training, years in practice and highest qualification, many of the counsellors with percentage ranging from 54.8% to 81.8% indicated that skills acquired during training is inadequate which is all above 50.0%. In fact with reference to year of training, majority of counsellors trained in the year

2016 to 2020 and above indicated that skills acquired is inadequate more than counsellors trained from 1998 to 2015. Also, with reference to institution 62.1% of counsellors trained from ENS Bambili, 68.5% trained from ENS Maroua, 63.0% trained from ENS Yaoundé, 66.1% trained from ENSET Bertoua, 59.2% trained from ENSET Douala, 57.6% trained in HTTTC Yaoundé, and 60.0% trained in ENSET Kumba indicated that they acquired inadequate skills during training.

Verification of Hypothesis:

Ho1: The skills acquired by school counsellors during training have no significant influence on their practice.

Ha1: The skills acquired by school counsellors during training have a significant influence on their practice.

Table 7: Perceived Impact of Skills Acquired during Training on Practice

Test	Statistical parameters	Skills acquired during training	Counsellors' practice
Pearson test	R-value	1	.621**
	p-value		.000
	n	246	246

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 7 above shows the perceived impact of skills acquired during training on practice. Based on the extent to which skills acquired during training could impact practice of counsellors, findings showed that there is a very significant, positive and strong impact between skills acquired during training and practice ($R\text{-value} = 0.621^{**}$, $p\text{-value} = 0.000 < 0.05$). The positive sign of the correlation value implies that counsellors are more likely to be effective in practice when they acquire adequate skills during training and less likely to be effective in practice when they do not acquire adequate skills during training. Therefore, the hypothesis that states that there is a significant relationship between the skills acquired by school counsellors during training and their practice was accepted. The hypothesis result is further expatiated on Table 8 below using a cross tabulation approach.

Table 8: Cross Tabulation Technique between Skills Acquired during Training versus Practice

			Practice		Total
			Adequately carry out practice	Inadequately carried out practice	
Skills acquired during training	Adequate	n	52	55	107
		%	48.6%	51.4%	
	Inadequate	n	32	106	138
		%	23.2%	76.8%	
Total		n	94	161	245

$$\chi^2 = 14.670, p\text{-value} = 0.000$$

Table 8 above shows the cross tabulation technique between skills acquired during training versus practice. In support of the findings from the correlation table above, using the cross tabulation technique between skills acquired during training versus practice, findings showed that counsellors who agreed to have acquired adequate skills during training are significantly better in their practice making a proportion of 48.6% than those who did not acquire adequate skills during training 23.2% ($p\text{-value} = 0.000 < 0.05$) although not satisfactory.

Counsellors were also asked to expatiate on their skills acquired during training and to say whether or not it they were sufficient. The findings are presented on table 9 below.

Table 9: Counsellors' Opinions on Skills Acquired during Training and whether they are Sufficient or Not.

Themes	Groundings	Skills acquired during training	Sufficient or not
		Quotations	
Communication, listening, empathy, attentiveness, questioning, trustworthiness, summarizing, orientation, observation	Many	<p>“I acquired some useful skills such as paraphrasing, questioning, listening and attending which are helping me to some extent to deal with my clients. However, these skills were not sufficient. More skills are needed such as diagnosis and interpretation”.</p> <p>“Listening, attentiveness, communication. As a counsellor, I listen more and talk less in an attentive manner using verbal and non-verbal communication skills. The skills were insufficient”.</p> <p>“Listening and empathy skills. They are not sufficient I am forced to carry out research to equip myself with more skills”.</p> <p>“The learned skills are listening, communication, questioning, attending, trustworthiness. The skills were not sufficient because there are some which can be well developed only in the field”.</p> <p>“Most of the important skills acquired were questioning, listening, summarizing and attending. They are not sufficient”.</p> <p>“Listening, communication, empathy skills, and talking in a way that someone will understand what you are trying to say. However, the skills acquired are insufficient”.</p> <p>“Questioning skills, observation skill, orientation skills, empathy, active listening are the skills acquired which were insufficient because I did not acquire skills on diagnosis and interpretation of clients problems”.</p>	Acquired skills from training rated insufficient
Evaluation, listening, assessment and follow up skills	Few	<p>“In my training, I acquired skills in listening, evaluation, and follow up but they are not sufficient”.</p> <p>“In my training, I acquired listening skills, assessment skills, follow up skills and evaluation but they were not sufficient”.</p>	
Individual and group counselling skills	Few	<p>“I obtained skills on individual and group counselling, etc. The skills were not sufficient as more skills such as ICT development and execution of school guidance program, psychological testing, were not adequately developed during training which are highly needed in my work place as a counsellor”.</p>	
Communication, managerial, cultural diversity and program planning	Few	<p>“Communication, managerial, cultural diversity and program planning are the skills actually laid down for practice but are not sufficient to do effective guidance and counselling”.</p>	
Individual consultation and	Few	<p>“I have acquired skills on individual consultation and information sessions”.</p>	

information session		but not quite sufficient”	
Counselling theories, psycho-pedagogy and child counselling	Few	“I acquired skills such as counselling theories, psycho-pedagogy and child-psychology. The skills were not sufficient”.	
Communication, listening, empathy, confidentiality, patience, humility, questioning, trustworthiness, management.	Few	<p>“They were sufficient though in the course of practice upgrading occurs. Attending, active listening, respect for confidentiality, and professional boundaries, resilience, patience, humility, non-judgmental approach, etc.</p> <p>“Listening, communication, management, eye contact. The skills were sufficient but with the use of ICT and research more have to be developed and to be implemented”.</p>	Acquired skills from training rated sufficient

Table 9 above shows counsellors opinions on skills acquired during training and whether they are sufficient or not. Furthermore, from the above table among the counsellors interviewed for the study and asking them about the skills acquired during training and whether they are sufficient or not, many of them said they acquired communication, listening, empathy, attentiveness, questioning, trustworthiness, summarizing, orientation, observation skills but these were not sufficient as depicted in their statements *“I acquired some useful skills such as paraphrasing of questioning, listening and attending which are helping me to some extent to deal with my clients. However, these skills were not sufficient. More skills are needed as diagnosis and interpretation”, “Listening, attentiveness, communication. As a counsellor, I listen more and talk less in an attentive manner using verbal and non-verbal communication skills. The skills were insufficient”, “Listening and empathy skills. They are not sufficient I am forced to carry out research to equip myself with more skills”*.

Furthermore, some said they acquired skills such as evaluation, listening, assessment and follow up skills but insufficient as depicted in the statements *“In my training, I acquired skills in listening, evaluation, and follow up but is not sufficient”, “In my training, I acquired listening skills, assessment skills, follow up skills and evaluation but they were not sufficient’*. Furthermore, some said they acquired individual and group counselling skills but rated it as insufficient as depicted in the statement *“I obtained skills on individual and group counselling, etc. The skills were not sufficient as more skills such as ICT development and execution of school guidance program, psychological testing, were not adequately developed during training which are highly needed in my work place as a counsellor”*.

Again, some counsellors said they acquired communication, managerial, cultural diversity and program planning skills but insufficient as narrated *“Communication, managerial, cultural diversity and program planning are the skills actually laid down for practice but are not sufficient to effectively do guidance and counselling”*. Furthermore, some counsellors said they acquired individual consultation and information skills but insufficient as narrated in the statement *“I have acquired skills on individual consultation and information sessions but not quite sufficient”*. Lastly, some counsellors said they acquired skills on counselling theories, psycho-pedagogy and child counselling but not sufficient as narrated *“I acquired skills such as counselling theories, psycho-pedagogy and child-psychology. The skills were not sufficient”*.

On the contrary, while many of the counsellors interviewed said skills acquired during training were insufficient, some said the skills acquired during training were sufficient as depicted in the statements *“They were sufficient though in the course of practice upgrading occurs. Attending, active listening, respect for confidentiality, and professional boundaries, resilience, patience, humility, non-judgmental approach, etc. “Listening, communication, management, eye contact. The skills were sufficient but with the use of ICT and research more have to be developed and to be implemented”*.

Furthermore, counsellors were asked to explain how the acquisition of insufficient skills acquired during training is affecting their practice and their opinions are presented on table 10 below.

Table 10: Counsellors Opinions on Impact of Insufficient Skills Acquired during Training on their Practice.

Insufficient skills affecting practice	Themes	Grounding	Quotations
Yes (Insufficient skills acquired agreed to affect practice)	Inability to do diagnosis, interpretation and psychological testing	Many	<p>"I feel lacking because I am unable to attend to my clients' needs especially in the area of test administration, diagnosis and interpretation"</p> <p>"It limits me sometimes when I am trying to get information from a client who is not willing to open up. I can't adequately handle issues like doing diagnosis and testing".</p> <p>"Yes, they are affecting my practice because I am unable to do diagnosis without psychological testing. So, psychological testing skills are very necessary".</p> <p>"Yes, they are affecting my practice because I cannot effectively carry out psychological testing because I am still struggling to understand it".</p> <p>"The skill of psychometric was limited. Sometimes, it is very difficult to analyse test results".</p> <p>"Difficulty in administering psychological tests".</p>
	Inability to follow up clients	Few	<p>"I am unable to fully and effectively do consultation and follow-up clients".</p> <p>"I am unable to fully and effectively do consultation and follow-up of clients".</p>
	Inability to handle students with psychological problems	Few	"Psychological testing skills were not sufficient and this affects effective counselling especially when I come across students with psychological problems".
	Not current on information		"With the lack of knowledge in ICT, I do most of my things manually as such, I am not current with information"
	Loss in what to do	Few	<p>"Yes, they are affecting my practice because in the field, I have come across situations that I do not know what to do or how to go about them simply because the training did not equip me a lot".</p> <p>"Insufficient skills acquired is affecting my practice in that when I come across certain cases, I do not know the counselling techniques to use".</p>
	Feel incompetent and embarrassed	Few	"Yes, insufficient skills make me to practice inadequately. I sometimes get stock during counselling sessions and have to break rules. At times, this makes me feel incompetent and embarrassed in front of the client".
	No (Insufficient skills acquired disagreed to affect practice)	Improvising	Few
Exposed to additional skills after training		Few	"The skills are not affecting my practice because other skills are put in place for the smooth running of the counselling activities".
Attended conferences, seminars		Few	"The insufficient skills acquired did not affect my practice because after training, I attended conferences and seminars which taught me a lot".
Practice with no problems		Few	"Although the skills acquired during practice were not sufficient and I was still able to carry on with practice without much problems".
Seek help from colleagues and taking refresher courses		Few	"They are not affecting my practice because I collaborate with my colleagues and I have equally done some online studies to upgrade my skills".

Table 10 indicates counsellors opinions on the impact of insufficient skills acquired during training on their practice. Furthermore, asking the counsellors interviewed if insufficient skills acquired during training is affecting their practice, many of them said it is affecting their practice while few said is not affecting their practice. Among the many counsellors that said insufficient skills acquired during training is affecting their practice, many of them said they are unable to do diagnosis, carry out interpretation and do psychological testing due to insufficient skills acquired during training as depicted in the statements *“I feel lacking because I am unable to attend to my clients’ needs especially in the area of test administration, diagnosis and interpretation”, “It limits me sometimes when I am trying to get information from a client who is not willing to open up. I can’t adequately handle issues like doing diagnosis and testing”, “Yes, they are affecting my practice because I am unable to do diagnosis without psychological testing”*.

Also, some said they are unable to follow up clients due to insufficient skills acquired during training as narrated *“I am unable to fully and effectively do consultation and follow-up clients”*. Again, some counsellors said they are unable to handle students with psychological problems because of insufficient skills acquired during training as narrated in the statement *“Psychological testing skills were not sufficient and this affects effective counselling especially when I come across students with psychological problems”*.

Furthermore, some counsellors said because of the insufficient skills acquired during training, they are sometimes completely loss on what to do and the counselling techniques to use when faced with some situations as explained in the statements *“Yes, they are affecting my practice because in the field, I have come across situations that I do not know what to do or how to go about them simply because the training did not equip me a lot”*. *“In insufficient skills acquired is affecting my practice in that when I come across certain cases, I do not know the counselling techniques to use”*. Again, some counsellors said they feel embarrassed and incompetent because of the insufficient skills acquired during training as narrated *“Yes, insufficient skills make me to practice inadequately. I sometimes get stock during counselling sessions and have to break rules. At times, this makes me feel incompetent and embarrassed in front of the client”*. Lastly, some counsellors said they remain uncurrent to information because of insufficient ICT skills acquired during training as narrated *“With the lack of knowledge in ICT, I do most of my things manually as such I am not current with information”*

On the contrary, among the few counsellors who said insufficient skills acquired during training is not affecting their practice, some of them said they often improvise and have adapted themselves when faced with different situations as narrated *“No, because I have learned to adapt in different ways”*. Also, some said they were exposed to additional skills after training as narrated in the statement *“The skills are not affecting my practice because other skills are put in place for the smooth running of the counselling activities”*. Furthermore, some counsellors said they attended conferences and seminars which compensated for the insufficient skills acquired during training as explained *“The insufficient skills acquired did not affect my practice because after training, I attended conferences and seminars which taught me a lot”*. Again, some counsellors said they often seek help from other counsellors thus their practice is not affected by the insufficient skills acquired from training as depicted in the statement *“They are not affecting my practice because I collaborate with my colleagues and I have equally done some online studies to upgrade my skills”*.

To elucidate, counsellors were asked to outline other skills they want their training to focus on and the findings are presented on table 11 below.

Table 11: Counsellors Opinion on Others Skills Training should focus on

Themes	Grounding
Use of ICT in record keeping / counselling	76
Psychological testing	64
Diagnosis	19
Non-verbal and verbal communication skills	9
Confidentiality	7

Critical thinking skills and problem solving	7
Interpretation	6
Trustworthiness	6
Emotional stability	5
Drug addiction	4
Intervention	3
Inclusive education to better handle learners with disabilities	3
Different stages of the counselling process	3
Referral skills	3
Practical skills	3
Patience	3
Reporting skills	3
Coordination and collaboration skills	3
Self-awareness	3
Mental health counselling skills	3
Genuineness	3
Non-judgmental	3
Cultural competency	3
Interpersonal skills	3
Self-control	2
Analytical skills	2

Again, from Table 11 above, asking the counsellors other skills their training should focus on, many of them said training should focus on the use of ICT in counselling and psychological testing. Other skills mentioned are diagnosis, non-verbal and verbal communication skills, confidentiality, critical thinking skills and problem solving, interpretation, trust, emotional stability, drug addiction, intervention, inclusive education to better handle learners with disabilities, different stages of the counselling process, referral skills, practical skills, patience, reporting skills, coordination and collaboration skills, self-awareness, mental health counselling skills, genuineness, non-judgmental, cultural competency, interpersonal skills, self-control and analytical skills.

DISCUSSIONS

This item intended to find out the different skills which school counsellors acquired during training to enable them practice effectively. The findings showed that majority of the counsellors said the skills acquired during training was inadequate more than those who said they acquired adequate skills during training and, further analysis showed that there is a very significant, positive and strong impact between skills acquired during training and practice. The positivity of the correlation value implies that counsellors are more likely to be effective in practice when they acquired adequate skills during training and less likely to be effective in practice when they do not acquire adequate skills during training. To expatiate further, findings showed that counsellors who agreed to acquired adequate skills during training are significantly better in their practice than those who did not acquire adequate skills during training although not satisfactory.

The findings also showed that the insufficient skills acquired during training is affecting many of the counsellors' practice in that many of them are unable to do diagnosis, carry out interpretation and do psychological testing, are unable to follow up clients, are unable to handle students with psychological problems, are sometimes completely loss on what to do and counselling techniques to use when faced with some situations, feel embarrassed and incompetent and are un-current to information because of insufficient ICT skills acquired during training.

As the findings indicated, skills acquired by many counsellors during their training which runs from 1998 to 2022 is inadequate and this is affecting negatively the practice of many of the counsellors. This findings tie with that of Ashman, Gillies and Beavers (1993) who carried out a study that involved 236 primary and secondary school counsellors employed by the Queensland Department of Education to evaluate the importance of various practices and skills and the degree to which these

were developed during training with the findings revealed that participants gave a low rating on the skills acquire during training. As a result of this, it was opined that there is need to expand the curriculum and to reconsider the manner in which practical skills can be taught to trainee counsellors.

Furthermore, in another study carried out by Alger and Luke (2015) that dissected high school counsellors' exposure to working with students on college and career readiness goals all counsellors revealed they had little to no training about Common Core Standards. As a result of the inadequate skills acquired by many counsellors during training, many of them reported other skills their training ought to focus on and the most mentioned skills are use of ICT in counselling and psychological testing of which many of them are poor in such skills. Other skills mentioned are ability to do diagnosis, communication skills, ethical skills, empathy, critical thinking skills and problem solving, interpretation, emotional stability when working with clients, skills to handle client with drug addiction, referral skills, reporting skills, coordination and collaboration skill, self-awareness, mental counselling skills, genuineness, non-judgmental, cultural competency, interpersonal skills, self-control and analytical skills. This clearly revealed that the counsellors are in need of lot of skills to enhance positively their practice.

According to the Shulman's Model of Pedagogical Reasoning and Action (1987), Shulman suggests that in order for a trainee to teach, he/she needs to transform his understanding or comprehension of the subject matter. The subject matter in this study is guidance and counselling. This implies that for a school counsellor to effectively carry out practice there is need for adequate understanding of guidance and counselling and this has to be accompanied with adequate acquisition of skills for smooth practice. However, for this to effectively occur, the trainers themselves have to demonstrate adequate knowledge and skills in guidance and counselling and the curriculum content of training programme has to reflect the existing context of training.

BACP (2007) has outlined skills that school/guidance counsellors need to be equipped with for effective practice which are advanced empathy, listening skills, critical thinking skills, focus, interpersonal skills, evaluative skills, communication, awareness of non-verbal communication, sensitive to voice quality, responsiveness, to expression of emotions, structuring time and use of language, understanding of the social systems and ability to carry out intervention. Most of the above skills that BACP (2007) reported for counsellors to adequately carry out practice are tie with of our findings whereby some of the counsellors said they need communication skills, ethical skills, interpersonal skills, empathy, and self-awareness for adequate practice.

The role of the counsellor revolves around employing new skills to aid the client/learner through the "dark entangled forest" (unknown) of his/her personality and society. Makewa (2008) cited in Tita-Nghamun (2016) asserts that for a successful counselling process the counsellor requires professional training to accomplish this task. By this, it means effective and adequate professional training. To further stress the importance of knowledge and skills acquisition, Ndirangu (2000) cited in Tita-Nghamun (2016) concedes that the counsellor should be well grounded in clinical psychology but, on the contrary, knowledge on psychology appears to be one of skills that many counsellors are deficient in which is affecting negatively their practice.

In as much as some researchers said counselling skills are learned over time and should be practiced by a professional teacher-counsellor as much as possible, the training institutions should have the necessary and right human resources, finance and materials resources to effectively carry on with practice. Our secondary schools are characterized by lot of deviant behaviours and other problems faced by students. Therefore, because of all these, our training institutions must ensure that their trainees are well trained with sufficient acquisition of knowledge and skills. Several professional organizations have guidelines for school counsellor roles which promote professionalism and ethical practice (ASCA, 2006), a skill that many of the counsellors do not adequately acquire during training.

Conclusion

The purpose of the study was to examine the skills acquired by school counsellors during training and its influence practice in schools. From the primary data collected and analysed, the findings showed that majority of the counsellors indicated that their training did not adequately prepared them for practice in that skills acquired during initial training were inadequate while few of them said training adequately prepared them for practice and skills acquired during initial training were adequate. Again, the findings showed that many of the counsellors perceived their training inadequate. The findings equally revealed that skills acquired during training, significantly influence school counsellors' practice. On this note, it is imperative that the quality of training being offered to student counsellors in training institutions in Cameroon be improved.

The job of a counsellor in contemporary times has been very demanding and as such, training needs to be of high standard to empower the counsellors to effectively address the various situations in the field. Baker and Gerler (2001) opined that guidance and counselling programs in schools had significant influence on improving discipline, enhancing students' grades, strengthening social skills, helping students make wise decisions on career development and college choices and developing positive study habits and study skills. In line with Baker and Gerler (2001), Hearne and Galvin (2015) also stated that guidance and counselling provision is seen as a whole school responsibility to support the needs of their students. Therefore, this being the case need for improvement in the quality of training in our training institutions need not be over emphasized.

Recommendations

From the results of this study, it is recommended that school counsellors should be trained to be multiskilled and provided with a variety of services for an ever-expanding client population. For instance multiculturalism, teenage suicide, child abuse and career counselling are having an impact upon the educational system in Cameroon as in other countries around the world. It would not seem feasible to offer more than just basic information or skill development in the many specific areas that counsellors may be asked to work. While most trainees will graduate from their training with a rudimentary knowledge of basic counselling skills associated with initiating and maintaining the helping relationship, there are a few opportunities within the context of the training program to introduce them to the range of cases and problems to which they will be confronted in the field.

In addition, the period for internship and training should be extended to give the student counsellors adequate time to acquire and master skills required of them during practice. Counsellor trainers should also use this period to effectively train and follow up student counsellors so that they can be adequately equipped with knowledge and skills required of them during practice. Also, the training should adequately address cultural diversity, be contextualized and offer a sound knowledge of psychology.

Again, these results can be an important step towards creating a codified list of needed competencies/skills for school counsellors. The dissemination of these competencies/skills can assist in informing school counselling stakeholders about the appropriate school counsellor roles, knowledge, and skills needed for the delivery of the school counselling core curriculum. It is hoped that this study will create an awareness among professional school counsellors that serves as an impetus to gain a greater understanding of multiculturalism and diversity, and that future research will be conducted in other geographic areas to ascertain data and compare the needs of school counsellors across the different regions of Cameroon.

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